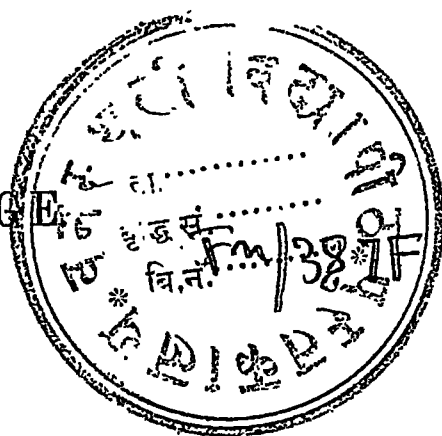




MIRAGE



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# MIRAGE.

BY

GEORGE FLEMING.

AUTHOR OF "A NILE NOVEL."

In Three Volumes.

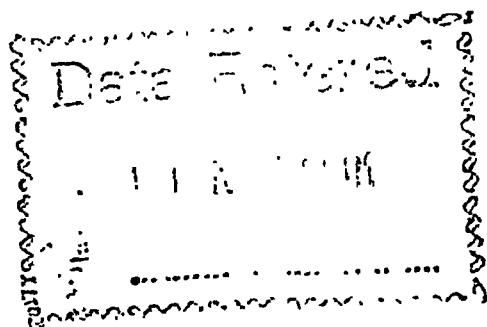
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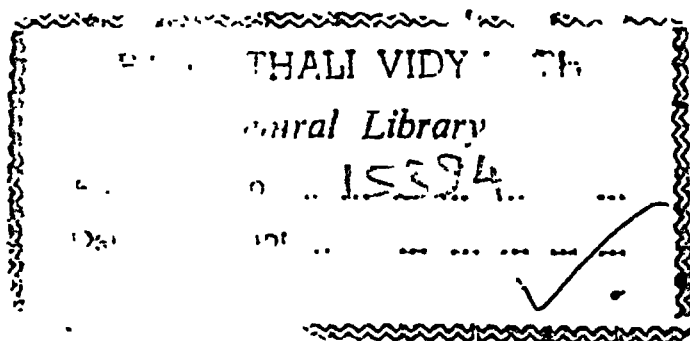
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TO

WALTER H. PATER,

*Author of "Studies in the History of the Renaissance."*

WITH PROFOUND ADMIRATION FOR THE RARE AND EXQUISITE

QUALITY OF HIS WORK.

GEORGE FLEMING,

*Tyrol, 1877.*

“Natural laws we shall never modify, embarrass us as they may ; but there is still something in the nobler or less noble attitude with which we watch their fatal combinations.”



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# MIRAGE.

## CHAPTER I.

“PARTANT POUR LA SYRIE.”

HER name was Constance—Constance Varley. At that time she was probably between one and two and twenty; a fair-haired girl, with eyes as clearly, frankly blue as the open blossom of a blue marsh-flower. Of her character and disposition it is somewhat more difficult to speak. Indeed I am inclined to believe that in those days there was no one who had any very definite understanding of either. Miss Varley herself had perhaps thought rather more about it than is

common with girls of her age ; but, on the whole, one's own self-judgment is apt to be of a vague and desultory nature, showing but little of that trenchant singleness of impression—that fine infallibility of decision—which enable us to classify the actions of our fellow-men. It has already been observed that the difficulty of judging any human being is materially increased by the slightest study of the subject.

But this was a consideration which, fortunately enough, had never occurred to any of Miss Varley's acquaintance. “Constance Varley, the dearest girl in all the world and my intimate friend, has promised to come with us. Tom is delighted. I am delighted. I am sure I need hardly ask if you are not delighted too,” Mrs. Thayer had written on this occasion of their journey. “But young men are so curious nowadays. Perhaps you do not care for pretty girls any longer, Jack?”

she added ; and Mr. Jack Stuart, reading the letter before his club fire, had laughed and thought what an inveterate match-maker little Fanny had become. It was reported later that he had even grumbled a little over the fact to his more intimate friends ; protesting that things had got to a pretty pass when a man could not even take a trip to the East without being let in for doing escort-duty to a lot of women. It was also remarked with what prompt and unanimous sympathy the complaint was received ; an exhibition of feeling which certainly made it difficult to account for the abnormal alacrity and interest displayed by Mr. Stuart in his final consultations with his tailor and bootmaker on the subject of his Syrian outfit.

“I do like your cousin ; I like him very much,” Miss Varley had assured her friend in the privacy of her chamber that morning.

“And then, you know, I had seen him before, ever so long ago—at The Farm—so that he does not seem a stranger. But I don’t think he can have been quite so imposing then? At least, I don’t remember those boots.” And then Mrs. Thayer had grown serious again, and declared that Constance was always making the wrong people appear ridiculous. “As though I should presume to laugh at such a *jeune premier* as Mr. Stuart, Fanny; unless, indeed, I did it in self-defence merely, as a protest against being dazzled,” the girl answered carelessly. And then her friend had been pacified, and kissed her, and they had gone out together arm-in-arm into the windy solitude of an Ismaïlian street.

There had been a good deal of previous discussion up at Cairo as to the length of time to be devoted to Ismaïlia. Mrs. Thayer had even waxed eloquent on the subject,

bringing a long array of facts and guide-books in support of her enthusiasm ; but by six o'clock that evening I fancy there was but little diversity of opinion left among them as to the interest and merits of the desert town. For Ismaïlia is only a singularly flat place—a city built upon the levelled sand—the wide spaces and open look of its streets reminding one of a sea-bathing village ; its houses running into that hopeless style of ornamentation which suggests the "villa to let." The greater part of them are but one storey high, with enormous projecting roofs, from under which the windows and doors peer out with a crushed yet indomitable expression, and bear a fantastic resemblance to the face of a good man struggling with adverse circumstance. And, indeed, as Major Thayer remarked, the whole place shares in that fantastic and temporary appearance, and affects one oddly

after awhile, inspiring curious doubts as to its probable duration and the advisability of sleeping there. For there was not a living creature abroad that day. As they passed along the silent streets, through the large abandoned squares, their advent seemed unnoticed and unheralded save by the fierce and steady wind; and although at first there had been a gallant effort made at merriment, it was not long before Mr. Stuart's allusions to the promised beauties of the desert town were received with melancholy resignation. By the time they reached the restaurant where dinner had been ordered, I think their leading impression was one of blank dismay.

At the café door they all paused for a moment, looking back. A fiercer gust of wind lifted a cloud of sand across the empty square. A thin despondent pariah dog limped painfully along, seeking for shelter

from the blast. From the large white house across the way, bearing the inscription *Pensionnat de Demoiselles*, came the feeble tinkling protest of an aged and unresisting piano.

“See Ismailia and die, Fanny,” suggested Miss Varley, wickedly.

“On the whole I think I should prefer to die first,” Mrs. Thayer answered, with conviction.

But as the evening wore on the situation brightened. A long and intimate conversation with the buxom landlady, who began by informing them, with pardonable pride, of her fourteen years’ residence *dans cet affreux désert*, and then dismissed the entire Eastern question with a slight French shrug, had had a reassuring effect upon their nerves. The discovery, at the farther end of the hall, of the small theatre, by the aid of which



*ces messieurs* were wont to beguile their evenings, was a still stronger argument in favour of the problematic population.

"In fact, I think you might almost be justified in stating, in your journal, that Ismailia was inhabited at a comparatively recent period of the world's history," Major Thayer remarked to his wife. "I confess I have had my doubts."

Miss Varley was examining the stage. Miss Varley was great at private theatricals. "Indeed, I consider that quite one of my specialities," she informed Mr. Stuart in a confidential aside; "it is a pity we did not know of this place before. We might have had a rehearsal this afternoon, and astonished the natives, with a view to charity, at night. I should have liked that. And I should have liked to see their faces at home when they heard, as they would hear,

that we were starrng it in the provinces on our way to Palestine."

Mr. Stuart laughed, and sprang up on the platform beside her.

"It is not half a bad little theatre this," he said, approvingly.

"The very place for a play. Major Thayer!"

"Well, my dear?"

"My name is Pauline, if you please. But what is the 'Lady of Lyons' without a lover? I want a lover——"

"Why did you not ask me then?" said Jack.

Miss Varley smiled. "I don't know about your making a good lover," she answered, calmly. She looked at him critically. "You would probably move about too much on the stage. Major Thayer, now, is famous for his Claude Melnotte, but you——"

It was not the way in which Mr. Stuart was accustomed to have his remarks received. It was a point which would bear arguing, he observed, leaning up against the side scene and looking down in Miss Varley's face. Miss Varley might at least have given him a trial, he objected—perhaps a trifle more earnestly than the occasion absolutely required.

In the pause which ensued Mrs. Thayer made another discovery. The row of wooden boxes ranged along the wall were found, on inspection, to contain the entire dramatic wardrobe of the missing company; and half an hour later any stranger happening in—if such an event had been a possibility in Ismaïlia—would have been rewarded by the spectacle of two gentlemen in Louis XV. costume and powdered wigs sedately drinking their tea in friendly companionship with a somewhat dubious Spanish

peasant and a young lady clad in complete bridal array.

But for this last metamorphosis it was the landlady alone who was responsible. If mademoiselle would only allow her, she had suggested, there was in her own room a costume—but a costume! Of the best! It was but even now that she had been engaged in repairing it. If mademoiselle would permit? And Miss Varley had laughed but submitted.

As she reappeared some moments later the landlady had followed her, a wreath of artificial flowers in her hand.

It was a thousand pities not to complete the toilette; and mademoiselle looked so like an angel in all that white; but what would you? It was a superstition, a *bêtise*; but mademoiselle could not have her orange-blossoms put on by the hand of an old married woman. "*Ça porte malheur*," she

said. If monsieur now would consent? her quick eyes swept over the group and fastened with ready tact on Mr. Stuart. If mademoiselle would allow it? And Miss Varley again consented.

But as she threw off her wreath an hour later it was with some slight petulant exclamation of dismay.

“Why do you give me orange flowers with concealed weapons in them, Mr. Stuart? You bring me bad luck,” she said, and held out her hand for him to see. A few red drops were slowly trickling from a deep scratch across its soft pink palm. “You are like the Greeks—your gifts are dangerous. I shall avoid them after this,” she added, laughing.

That Mr. Stuart’s contrition was both sincere and eloquent in its expression could easily be gathered from the heightened colour with which Miss Varley turned away,

but his actual words were lost in the general good-night which followed. The two rooms provided for their party were a few steps farther down the street—large empty chambers, with doors opening directly out upon the side-walk.

“I don’t think Ismailia has turned out so badly after all,” Mrs. Thayer remarked, sitting up in bed the better to observe the slower movements of her companion. “At least, you seemed to be enjoying yourself pretty well, Constance. I wonder what Jack thinks of the way he spent his evening now?”

It was a question Miss Varley professed herself unable to answer.

“As a flirtation I think it may be said to have been a success. I do not think—no, I really do not think I can remember ever having seen anything progressing more satisfactorily,” Mrs. Thayer continued lazily from

her vantage-ground among the pillows. "But whether I ought to countenance it as your chaperon——"

"Is a point you may as well decide upon to-morrow morning, dear. At least, I, for one, am going to sleep. If my flirtations—I never flirted in my life—but if my flirtations, as you choose to call them, succeed in keeping you awake, it is more than they have ever done for me," Miss Varley concluded, with a smothered yawn.

But her next action was perhaps hardly in strict accordance with the heartlessness of this speech. Indeed, as she turned her face away from the open window, its changed and softened expression was patent even to Mrs. Thayer's sleepy eyes.

"Is there anything there to be seen? What is it, Constance?" she demanded, raising herself upon one arm. But Miss Varley had blown out the light. It was

nothing. In fact, she was only looking at the night, to see if there were any stars, she answered, with some confusion. But the sky was covered with clouds again, and —“that was all,” she said.

It was between six and seven o'clock the next morning when they started for Port Said. At first the steamer crosses a wide lake-like enclosure—whose waves, of a deep sea-blue, were lifting and tossing with what seemed a new and delicious freshness after the long tranquillity of the Nile voyage—and then turns suddenly aside and enters the Suez Canal, leaving behind it the billowy sand-hills of Ismaïlia, to begin a long, long, endlessly long stretch of water, with high steep banks on either hand, which only break at rare intervals and let one catch a glimpse of the vast level desert beyond. When they started, the sky was still clear overhead, but an ominous wind was tearing



and scattering the cloud-masses at the horizon, ruffling the long straight strip of canal, and running along the low gray fringe of shrubs that lines the water's edge.

The little steamer moved but slowly forward. Now and then they overtook some man, standing up to his waist in the canal, sounding the depth of the encroaching sand. Once, an Arab sportsman passed them, carrying a long gun over his shoulder, his head muffled in countless folds of linen, his brown dress fluttering wildly in the wind. As they drew nearer he slowly climbed the bank, turning again to look at them, and making Miss Varley point out to her companion the singular beauty and distinctness of a figure seen against the desert sands. "It is a pity you were not with us in Egypt," she added, carelessly.

As she spoke, Mrs. Thayer rose quietly from her chair, gathered together her gloves

and book and parasol, tapped her husband on the shoulder, and deliberately walked away to the farther part of the deck. And Constance looked after her with a deprecatory smile.

"That is Fanny's little protest," she said, laughing. "You see Major Thayer and I have simply driven poor Fanny wild by talking about the Pharaohs; and as she hated the Nile, and as she sternly disapproved of each temple and tomb and pyramid, she always flies whenever there is any symptom of our mentioning either."

"But *you* liked it, didn't you?"

"Liked what? Egypt? Well, I don't think that is quite the way I should put it. There are some things to which the word would hardly apply, you know."

"Ah yes, I see. I suppose you must have found it rather slow at times," said Mr. Stuart, simply.

Miss Varley smiled. It was not exactly the idea she had intended to convey. "I meant—oh, what is the need of explaining things? you know what I mean. I would no more think of liking Egypt than of liking the starlight or the sea. It is one of those things which does not admit of pretty epithets. You would not think of calling a sunset pretty, you know."

"Why not?—except that I should say nothing about it in all probability. I never look at sunsets and that kind of thing unless somebody tells me to. Now you"—— He hesitated, and looked at the girl rather dubiously. "My cousin Tom must be the very fellow to get along well with you, I suppose. Tom can talk poetry and all that sort of stuff by the hour when he likes."

"Oh yes. Major Thayer and I are quite in the habit of doing that," she answered

gravely. "You can have no idea, until you have heard us, what extremely poetical people we are."

Mr. Stuart laughed. But one could never tell when Miss Varley was in earnest or when she was merely chaffing a fellow, he complained.

"That is because everything is premeditated with me," said Constance. "Somebody told me once that I was inscrutable. I have been endeavouring to become so ever since."

Mr. Stuart had never guessed a conundrum in his life. But still, impossible to comprehend as Miss Varley might be, he thought that with an effort——

"As though you would be likely to make an effort!"

"And why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, I don't know. Chiefly because it is not 'your nature to,' I suppose."

"I should like to know how you found that out."

"Oh, I'm a student of character, Mr. Stuart; and I have theories; I believe in intuitions and things."

"I defy you to tell me of a single leading trait of mine," said Stuart, throwing himself back in his chair, and assuming as severely non-committal an expression as was compatible with a somewhat weak yet handsome countenance.

Miss Varley looked at him with some attention. There can be no doubt that she was distinctly impressed by the striking symmetry of his features in their enforced repose. Whether she understood their weakness it is impossible to say.

"You are the very reverse of indolent, Mr. Stuart. Indeed, I am convinced that a kind of stern devotion to an ideal of unremitting labour is as marked a trait of your character

as is your love of nature—sunsets, and all that sort of thing, you know,” she added, mischievously.

They were both experiencing that slight but exhilarating form of excitement which all young and healthy-minded creatures experience in making one another’s acquaintance—the delightful curiosity of the explorer into strange lands, where each familiar object derives a new charm from its unaccustomed surrounding. And, like other explorers, they began by looking for resemblances. The discovery of dissonance and limitation belongs properly to the second and later period of such studies. It is true that modern science and the Geographical Society have curiously narrowed the extent of lands as yet unclassified. I have sometimes thought that what we have agreed to call the best society has achieved a somewhat similar result.

But this, I need hardly say, was a reflection which did not occur to Mr. Stuart. Nor do I think that either then or later did he ever make any attempt at analysing his sensations. For the present it was certainly quite enough for him to sit beside this agreeable companion, whom chance had thrown in his way, letting himself be easily amused, and filling up the pauses between his remarks by lazily watching the motion of her fingers. Constance had remarkably pretty hands. At that particular moment they were busily employed in alternately ruffling and smoothing down the delicate tawny-coloured head of a large Syrian greyhound—the last purchase before leaving Cairo. She was leaning a little back in her chair, the dog's head resting on her lap; and Mr. Stuart's eyes followed, with a certain involuntary interest, the light, firm pressure of her touch, noting, with an appreciative eye, the warm, creamy

curves and shell-pink dimples in the supple hand and wrist. An absurd and unreasonable impatience of her action mixed itself up oddly enough with what he was saying.

“You will spoil that dog,” he said, at last, abruptly.

Miss Varley glanced at him with some surprise.

“What—spoil Lione? Oh no; why should I? Poor old boy! Do see what beautiful eyes he has, Mr. Stuart?” She took the dog’s head in both hands, and held it up towards Jack. “Such loving, melancholy eyes! But I don’t believe in them one bit, you know. People tell me that these greyhounds are wretchedly cold-hearted creatures in their way; and indeed this fellow here did not mind leaving his old master in the least. And he will follow anyone—he will go to Hassan as quickly as he will come to me.”



She let his head drop again, and one could almost have imagined that the dog understood her words, to see him lay a protesting paw upon her knee, and gravely thrust his cold black nose into her hand.

“What do you keep the brute for then?” said Stuart.

“Oh, I like him. He reminds me of another dog I knew once upon a time. And then all unreasoning animals are fond of me. I don’t entirely despair of winning his affections yet, you see. Don’t you believe I can?”

But Mr. Stuart had moved his chair rather impatiently to one side and spoke of something else. A moment later he glanced around again. He leaned slightly forward, and took up a string of amber beads which lay upon Miss Varley’s lap.

“No, please. I can’t possibly let you have my beads to play with. I never

let anyone touch them,” said Constance, quickly, putting out her hand.

“You had these on yesterday. Do you always wear them, then?” holding the yellow string against the light.

“Always. I do not think I have been without them a day for the last three years or more. And—will you give them back to me, please?”

“I don’t really see why I should,” said Mr. Stuart, deliberately. “If I did, it would only be to gratify you, and you have refused to gratify *me*. You would not take my advice about that dog, you know.”

“Poor old Lione!” said Miss Varley, laughing. She bent down and laid her cheek against the delicate tawny head. “As though you and I were not be friends any more! But we are above being dictated to in that fashion, are we not, Lione?”

"Here, Lione! Come here, sir!" said Mr. Stuart, sharply.

The dog started, pricked up his ears, hesitated for a moment, and then walked deliberately over to Jack.

"That is what Lione thinks about it. You see that I am generous enough to refrain from any comment," said that gentleman, with a triumphant smile.

Miss Varley leaned languidly back in her chair. It was a lesson not to count upon people—not even upon dogs, she said, and folded her hands meekly together. But the meekness was somewhat out of harmony with the expression of her eyes a moment later. "For a member of the Society for the Promotion of Cruelty to Animals, I am glad to observe that your instincts are rather better than your principles," she said, and looked meaningly at the fingers absently playing with Lione's collar.

Mr. Stuart drew back his hand and looked extremely foolish. But it was an altogether different affair, he explained. There was no resemblance between that weak indulgence of a dog's worst susceptibilities, which Miss Varley was fostering, and the kindly yet authoritative touch of a master. It was only proper some acknowledgment should be made of the animal's prompt and commendable recognition of masculine superiority, he said.

And in the half-serious discussion which followed, Lione's claims to attention faded entirely away, until—like many another blameless individual—he found himself of not the slightest interest to the very advocate who was pleading his case. It was perhaps with a fortunate philosophy that he accepted the situation, and laid himself down to sleep at Mr. Stuart's feet. For human biography must, from a dog's point

of view, be chiefly characterised by a consistent lack of logic. And much of what followed was strictly biographical. Whatever reason Mr. Stuart might have had for listening with a certain pleasure to those details of Miss Varley's home life, those descriptions of her father and step-mother, those anecdotes about "the boys," Lione would undoubtedly have heard them with the most disinterested indifference.

Of Jack's past history I fancy there was something more to tell; and yet, broadly speaking, it could be reduced to the commonplace college experience of an ordinary young man. And following fast upon those years of hearty enjoyment and involuntary study, came years of work—Mr. Stuart was in his father's bank—in which the same liberal hand seemed to preside over the proportion of enjoyment to labour. Altogether, a life flowing smoothly and cheerfully along a well-cut

channel ; a healthy, pleasant, harmless—if not a picturesque—existence.

Once only in the course of that morning the little steamer stopped. It was at a small and dingy inn, built close upon the water's edge, with a rickety wooden piazza running around its front, and a poor attempt at a garden on one side. A wretched little garden it was, full of great boxes of earth, in which a few feeble geraniums and some sickly-looking verbena-plants were vainly struggling for subsistence. And there was something of this same suggestion of useless effort in everything about the place—in the loose and slouching figure of the man who waited on the steps to receive such scanty orders for food as the travellers might give ; in the gaunt mistrustful dogs, creeping warily in and out among the tables ; in the pale and hollow-eyed little woman, whose eager, sallow face was lighting up with un-

familiar smiles in answer to Miss Varley's questions.

For, "Are those your own children?" that young lady was asking in her gentlest voice. "You must find it very difficult to keep them so wonderfully neat and clean. But what a nice place you have got for them to play in here, and how pleasant it must be for them to sit in the shade and see the ships go by."

"They will be getting wilder, more like savages, every year. Tony! come here this moment and speak to mademoiselle when she is good enough to notice you. But they will not come when you call them. It is of no use," the mother said in her complaining, peremptory voice. "They are savages."

"They are dear little children, I think," said Constance, looking up with friendly eyes. "And I am sure I have something here in my bag that Tony would be glad

to see, if he would only come here for a moment.” She held out her hand, and the child crept shyly nearer, hiding his face in his arm, and glancing at her furtively from behind the shelter of each table-leg and chair, until at last he gained courage to put his small brown fingers into hers.

And Jack looked on with an approving smile.

They were dirty little ‘beggars, those children; and as for the girl, Mr. Stuart had never seen such a terrible squint in his life. But then it always looked well to see a woman take to a child—any child. It was the proper feminine thing to do. And if there was a thing which Mr. Stuart abhorred——. “As for myself I quite dislike children, I assure you,” said Constance, looking calmly up. “I have two little half-brothers of my own, you know, and I find them very disagreeable in a general way.



Of course that does not prevent one's being kind to the poor little wretches when one has a chance ; but still——”

“I wish you would not say such things about yourself. With me, of course, it is different ; but if anybody else should hear you make such a speech—I should not like it at all,” said Jack, very decidedly.

And so the afternoon wore on. As the hours passed the day grew darker, there were even a few drops of rain, and then—the wind rising once more and tearing the low-lying mists asunder—a brilliant burst of sunshine, which turned to reddish gold the shining rosy breasts of a flock of pink flamingoes rising from out the marsh. It was the last bit of colour in the day. An hour later a violent storm of rain and wind was blotting out the uncertain outline of the town. Even before they left the steamer they could already hear that dull booming

sound of the surf upon the shore, which in after days became a part of all their impressions of Port Said.

The ladies were both tired that night, Miss Varley especially so, and shortly after dinner they had gone to their rooms. But an hour or so later, passing along the corridor, Mr. Stuart came suddenly upon a lighted candle flaring wildly in the draught, and heard a voice inviting him to come outside upon the terrace and listen to the waves.

The rain had ceased. A fresh wet wind was blowing steadily, strongly in, bringing with it the chill salty smell, the monotonous roar of the turbulent seething sea.

"We shall have a rough passage to-morrow," the young man said, looking up at the inky blackness of the sky.

Miss Varley did not answer. She was crouching against the balustrade, wrapped

in some thick white cloak. Her hair was blown back from her face, her cheeks were pale, her eyelids heavy, with the fierce caresses of the wind. As they entered the lighted hall again Mr. Stuart was struck by the singular abstracted look of her lips and eyes.

“There is not a star to be seen,” she said absently, glancing up as he closed and bolted the door. “Ever since you joined us—do you know this is the third successive night there has not been a star? I hope it is not an evil omen.”

## CHAPTER II.

### SHOWING HOW THEY WENT UP TO THE TEMPLE.

AND perhaps Miss Varley was right. Perhaps there *was* some occult influence at work. It certainly looked like it the morning they came in sight of Jaffa—a still gray morning, broken by brief sharp intervals of pattering rain. A morning made even more monotonous by the slow regular grinding of the waves against the beach; made even more disconsolate by the captain's hesitation as to whether they could ever get ashore.

For the harbour of Jaffa is a mere convention—an accident of wind and tide. A long scattered reef of rock, the *débris* of the ancient city, reaches across from side to side, broken only by two narrow clefts through which it is just possible for boats to pass ; while all about, a line of leaping water, a cloud of high-tossed spray, flashes and breaks beneath the overhanging town. For Jaffa is a city set upon a hill, a storm-bound, sea-girt city, blanched, and worn, and beaten by the wind ; the oldest city in the world, gray, heaped, defiant, setting its steadfast face against the sea.

And clinging to its steps, thronging its dark and tortuous lanes, what strange, what multicoloured life is there ! Now elbowed off the slippery stepping-stones by some wild Russian pilgrim, his worldly goods slung in a cumbersome roll across his back ; now crushed against some contemplative

Turk smoking in his doorway by that long string of heavy-laden camels, advancing with the calm consciousness of size ; again, compelled to wade through a pool of water to avoid this row of pushing, imperturbable donkeys ; knocked about by the natives, shoved aside by every porter, apostrophised in every Eastern tongue, splashed, muddied to the eyes.

“ Did not someone write a book on the ‘ Pleasures of Eastern Travel ? ’ ” asked Mrs. Thayer resignedly, as they passed out from under the last crumbling and grass-fringed archway.

A long wide common in the condition of a ploughed field after an inundation—made picturesque with domes of snowy canvas, made dreary with the mournful line of Cook tourists, each seated in his own mud puddle at the door of his own tent—and they had reached a lovely country lane winding up

the side of a hill between two gray-green rows of prickly-pear. Past these a sea of orchards, bending, and fragrant, and golden with orange-trees. The noise and jar of the city fell away from them as in a dream; the sky was all blue and tremulous after the rain; a weak soft wind came wandering across the fields, bringing with it the sweet breath of a world in flower; and, for the first time, Miss Varley realised that this was springtime—and springtime in Syria.

And, as the hours passed, this impression only deepened. It was yet early in the afternoon as they rode out of the Jerusalem Gate. A delicate and evanescent sunshine flickered and played about the day. The birds were singing in every hedgerow, a warm and fitful wind dashed in their faces as they cantered on. Looking for miles and miles away, there was no tree, no house, no village to be seen. Only the silence of

satisfaction brooded above these flower-crested fields, across whose billowy sweep the lavish spring broke in a sea of life, of colour, and of bloom.

And they rode on and on. The sun sank lower on the horizon, the pale sky whitened, grew more ethereal in the east; the pallid cacti crowded once more along the narrowing path, until, at last, lifting from out the gray and gleaming shadow of an olive-grove, they saw the tower of Ramleh reddening in the sun.

Now, having once asserted that Mrs. Thayer, though a small, was yet a perfect example of the typical American woman, it is perhaps superfluous to add that Mrs. Thayer was always tired. Indeed, a sensation of lively fatigue might be said to represent her normal experience of life. "I am afraid I have been tiring you? Won't you sit down and rest a moment, Fanny?" the



Major was reported as having said to her one evening at a ball. It was in the early days of their engagement, and Miss Fanny smiled rapturously at him in return. "Oh, thanks. But it isn't of any consequence—really. I have been tired ever since I was ten years old, you see," she explained, complacently. And a longer acquaintance had only induced her husband to accept the statement as a fact.

Mrs. Thayer was one of those women whom it is very safe to praise. As a girl, Miss Morgan had been a general favourite; as a married woman, Mrs. Thayer was universally popular. From her cradle to her marriage the same exhibition of pretty smiling indifference had won her the same tribute and applause. The same quality of tact had obtained an identical result. From the days of lollipops to those of lovers, Fanny Thayer had never offended a single

human being—her very success was veiled, and quiet, and endurable.

She was a little woman with many principles, absolutely no passions, and very little digestion. A charmingly pretty little woman, with a placid, affectionate disposition. She was good-natured, clear-voiced, scrupulously truthful in words, devoted to the Anglican Church, novel reading, old silver, and to Major Thayer. She was both well-informed and intelligent, making it a rule to read every new book praised either in the *Nation* or the *Atlantic Monthly*. She believed in "culture," but was also anxious to possess a "liberal mind," for which purpose she eschewed modern furniture, affected gowns of a peculiar make, and read Matthew Arnold—whom as a poet she secretly considered to be far below Coventry Patmore—and she was not incapable of literary self-denial. When it became a social duty in

Boston, she was among the first to read and "analyse" the works of Turgeneff. But the novels in which her very soul delighted were those of "Ouida."

In age, she was about seven or eight and twenty—in appearance, some four or five years younger—a delicate, thin little woman, with small regular features, very red lips, and an appealing infantine smile. Her favourite amusement—the one which called for all her skill and tact and power of pleasing, the one containing too a strong delicious thrill of vicarious excitement—was matchmaking. I have already stated that Miss Varley was her favourite friend. It is even possible that these last two considerations had had their share in suggesting this Syrian journey. Certainly any other solution of Mrs. Thayer's sudden fancy for Eastern research seemed an inadequate motive, viewed in the light of her injured incredulity when brought face to

face with the ruined arches, the silent courts of Ramleh.

"A tower? Another tower to climb when I have been riding—absolutely *riding*—for hours? Oh Tom, this is really not considerate."

"Poor Fanny? But you are right. Climbing was distinctly not in the bond," said Constance gaily.

"It's a bore, of course. Seeing places is always a nuisance. But I think you will find it rather mortifying later on if you have not done it, Fanny. Why, even Cook's tourists do Ramleh, you know," suggested Mr. Stuart.

"Very fine look-out by top, lady. Him not high tower," added the ubiquitous Hassan.

But Mrs. Thayer only shook her head with a mild obstinacy peculiarly her own. It was, really a matter of duty, she remarked gently

—it was her *duty* to abstain from all superfluous exertion. It was of course difficult for people in robust health, like Constance, for instance, to appreciate the effort she had been making all day. It was the most natural thing in the world that Tom——

“Poor little woman! But indeed I was afraid all along it would be too much for you,” Tom interrupted her, with great contrition.

And then there was a general consultation, which ended in Mrs. Thayer being put in her saddle once more, while her husband walked along by her side. She would not hear of the others following. It would be really too bad if they all had to miss the view merely on her account. Mr. Stuart would certainly not object to taking care of Constance? Mr. Stuart professed himself delighted.

They went up. The latest shadows of

late afternoon were creeping across the plain, but the far-off line of sea was still shining in the sun, and a pale golden light floated above the orange gardens of Jaffa. They leaned out over the crumbling parapet together. From far below rose up the clear shrill laughter of some children playing among the tombs. Two large brown birds started from their nest half-way down the tower, and sailed slowly past without a motion of their wings. Constance leaned farther out, and watched them lose themselves in that wide sea of space. She made a pretty picture standing there—her face all rosy with pleasure and exercise, and in her eyes, and on her lips, a smile. The gray old stones behind her brought out in strong relief the delicate blonde colouring of her face and hair. The tightly-fitting habit did perfect justice to each graceful supple pose of the rounded figure. Mr. Stuart looked at her

with simple admiration. Nothing half so charming, the young man thought, had ever come into his way before.

And perhaps this conviction may have become somewhat too apparent in the fixity and eagerness of his glance. It is certain that, before many moments had passed, some slight self-consciousness crept into Miss Varley's attitude. The colour deepened a little in her cheeks ; an almost imperceptible rigidity tightened the muscles of her mouth ; there was a certain embarrassment in the fluttering movement of the hands that trifled with her whip.

"I think this tower is charming. I delight in towers," she said, abruptly. "There is something glorious in this sense of height, of being lifted above the world—out of life, as it were. It makes all little things seem so petty. I don't wonder Saint Simon Stylites was canonised. I believe

that living alone and on an elevation would even make a saint of me."

"You don't get dizzy then," said Jack, conversationally. "Some people do, you know. There was a man in my class at Harvard; that is, he would have been in my class, only old Davies—the mathematical examiner I was telling you about, you know—he conditioned him when he came up for his last go at it; gave him another year, in fact, which was a great shame when you consider——"

"The moon! Mr. Stuart, I see the moon. 'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the Valley of Ajalon.' Don't you remember? And there it is." She lifted up her hand and pointed to a pale vapourous disk, the mere ghost of a moon, hanging far off above the darkling hills. "How wonderful—how wonderful it is!"

"Someone told me a good conundrum



about that the other day. Wish I could remember it. Something about Joshua. 'Why was the prophet Joshua a——' No; that isn't it. 'When was the moon——' "

Miss Varley started, and looked up apologetically. It was very stupid of her, but she had dropped her whip, her favourite whip. Had they not better go down and look for it? she suggested innocently.

To reach camp they passed through the Turkish graveyard. The last glow of the sunset was reddening all the quaint and narrow stones; a mass of flaunting anemones covered each grave, the blood-red colour bursting like flames from out each crevice in the wall; and a troop of Syrian children were pursuing each other, with cries of wild, shrill joy, along the path. But, as these two young people rode on, the sun sank suddenly below the horizon; a sharp chill ran like a shiver through the air; and from between

the swaying cypress-trees there came a group of women, white-robed, and veiled, and silent as the dead. It was a wonderful bit of effect—the wilderness of wan, gray stones, the sudden silence, the spectral, shrouded figures among those funereal trees. It was an accident, of course. A mere suggestion. Something which made Constance remember the far-off mystery of that shadowy moon. And still the women stood there motionless; their long loose garments waving in the rising wind—“quite like a transformation-scene in a first-class London pantomime,” Mr. Stuart suggested cheerfully.

But Mrs. Thayer looked anxiously into her friend's face, as they cantered up to the door of the largest tent a moment later. “Surely you haven't been quarrelling with Jack, dear child,” she asked with genuine concern.

“What an idea!”

“Well, I don’t know,” doubtfully; “I thought you were looking rather vexed.”

“It would be difficult to be vexed with Mr. Stuart,” Miss Varley answered dryly. “Mr. Stuart was most amiable, certainly. He saw something which reminded him of a conjuring effect. He has been telling me all about it—about Maskelyne and Cooke—their principal tricks, you know, ever since we left Ramleh.” And then, in answer to the puzzled look which still cast its shade upon Mrs. Thayer’s countenance, “You dear little goose,” she said lightly, resting her hands upon Fanny’s shoulders and looking affectionately into her face, “why don’t you cultivate a little Eastern hospitality instead of standing there and criticising me? Or is this intended for a base modern imitation of Abraham entertaining the angel in the doorway of his tent?”

They went in. These Syrian tents are

luxurious resting-places in their way. "It reminds me of a painted tomb, don't you know. One of those Theban tombs, I mean," said Major Thayer, looking around at the brilliant and fantastic red, and blue, and white, and yellow decorations of his canvas walls. "I think it simply enchanting," said Fanny, enthusiastically, from the depths of the easiest chair. "So picturesque! give me that footstool, Jack; so gipsy-like—and the cushion. Thanks. I never could understand why soldiers make such a fuss about roughing it. I suppose they can't help it though, being men."—"Him very good when him dry, lady," suggested Paolo, darkly. But it was only the waiter speaking. The prophetic murmur passed unheard.

The next morning the sun was still low in the east as Constance threw open the curtains of her tent. Before her lay a

white and shining world, all glistening with dew. Early as it was, the camp was already in movement; a thin blue smoke curled up from between the olive-trees, a group of muleteers were taking their coffee before the fire. As she crossed the field towards the picketed horses, a weird chorus of welcome rose from beside the road, a sound which made her start, and drop her flowers, and then walk hastily back to the shelter of the tents. For she had come upon a ghastly sight, a circle of Syrian lepers hanging about the outskirts of the camp, pale, crippled shapes, whose hollow cries for alms rang like a mockery through the clean new gladness of the day.

“Poor things! I am not quite sure if it is right to pity them, though. Being in the Bible, and all that, makes such a difference. And anything so exceptionally horrible must be accepted as the manifest

working of Providence, of course," Fanny remarked, looking mournfully about the breakfast-table as she spoke.

"As though Providence——"

"Now don't, Tom ; don't, there's a dear ! Don't be profane. It is such *mauvais genre*. And when you think we shall see Jerusalem to-day ! Why it's like a pilgrimage, something.—Oh, that milk ! Constance, look at that milk, will you ? And after all that I've said. Really, Tom, I wish you would speak to Hassan yourself about it. There are some things in life that can't be borne, you know," said Mrs. Thayer.

The day was cloudless. The lines of the hills were soft ; they seemed to lead the soul away into a dream of peace. This Syrian scenery moves one with a strange emotion. Is it religion ? is it the lingering superstition of childhood—the faint persuasive vision of far-off days ? For the one

supreme goodness of the world's history has left a crowning grace on field and sky ; the peace which passeth all understanding broods over these sunlit spaces ; there is the shadow of a Presence among those far blue hills. It was late in the afternoon before the travellers reached the level road again. For hours the path had climbed higher and higher through thin, pale olive-groves, past crumbling ruin and wall, higher and higher among the pale and desolate hills. And it was evening when they saw Jerusalem. Its gray wall, its towers and domes, lay before them. They had just made the last ascent of the road, and taken a last turn, when, suddenly, the city of great renown—small, gray, impressive—was there. Pilgrim and Crusader had been here before them. For centuries that narrow road had been pressed by hastening, weary feet ; the eyes of countless thousands had

strained to see that spot; and with what thoughts, with what deep reverence, what wonder, what awe, begotten by no other city of this great world. Classic Rome, marvellous Athens, radiant Paris, or mighty London—could they quicken and still the sense of all that is momentous and unanswerable, like this gray Judean fortress, this old stronghold of religion, this shrine and this tomb?

They were a motley crowd of wayfarers upon the narrow pass that day. Strange pilgrims, footsore and ardent; strange pilgrims from the steppes of Russia, and from the naked hills of Spain; pilgrims from north and south, and east and west—spell-bound, and awe-struck, and dumb!

And then, in the gray hush of that colourless twilight, they all moved on together to where the best blood of the great mediæval ages has thronged; to where the



best thought of all ages has turned ; to the gate whence came forth the Jews and Gentiles who had known, heard, seen, and—crucified Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER III.

### A CASE OF PHOTOGRAPHS.

ONE day they rode to Bethany. The path wound about the foot of the Mount of Olives, and then up a steep and stony defile. As they rode on they looked down into valleys and out across the rounded slopes of barren hills, all gray with stones and dark with olive-trees, to where a line of more luxuriant green followed the tortuous Jordan in its course, and the Dead Sea water lay all blue and shining in the light. It was a warm and windless afternoon, and the gray old world seemed sleeping in the springtime

sun. Everything was full of an ineffable sense of repose, of peace, and long unbroken silences.

Bethany itself is a small gray village, built of stone—a dozen houses walled about and made secure against the Bedaween raids. At the sound of the clattering hoofs, a troop of pretty, ragged children came swarming out of every hut—an eager, laughing, light-footed band—pushing about the horses' feet, offering for sale wild masses of weeds dragged from the nearest bank, crying, gesticulating, appealing : a sudden whirl of noise, and life, and colour. They saw the house of Lazarus ; they clambered down a steep and broken flight of stairs into the small, dark opening of the rock-hewn tomb ; they gathered wild-flowers by the door ; they feed the guardian, they feed the children, they feed some ancient women who were waiting on the road ; and then they stood and looked at each other

with that blank, serious, somewhat embarrassed expression not unfamiliar to travellers upon consecrated ground. Nothing is more perturbing than the absence of an expected emotion.

It was along the upper road that they returned to the city. The stone-strewn fields were full of blossoming almond-trees, a miracle of grace and colour among the naked hills encompassing Jerusalem. There was even a certain pathos in the mingling of this frail and exquisite beauty with the bleak sternness of the landscape—it was like the tenderness of Christ crowning and transfiguring the stern and rigid forms of the old Jewish faith. And as the twilight fell about them, the rose-tinted bloom of the trees seemed to deepen in colour, a faint pink flush glowed along every rocky steep—an effect inconceivably lovely as seen against that background of gray sky, gray hills, and

gray and ghostly graves. For they had passed the Garden of Gethsemane—a small silent enclosure, made shadowy with olive-trees, made sweet and bright with common cottage flowers; the faint clinging smell of lavender, keen-scented thyme, or rosemary could always bring that moment back to Constance. They had left the garden behind them, and had entered the shadow of the city walls, down in that silent valley where the dead lie thick and close, a solemn line of sentinels guarding the City of the Grave. And as they checked their horses at the gate the last red colour faded from the sky; high overhead the pale new moon was floating in a sea of silvery mist.

“And that was not a bad idea; not a bad idea by any means,” remarked Mr. Stuart, approvingly, as he helped Mrs. Thayer to dismount before the tents beyond the Jaffa gate.

"You like Bethany, lady? Very nice place. Some day you go there, stay all day. Take your Bible and your lunch with you, and make his picture," suggested Hassan, cheerfully.

"Oh, I shall certainly go there repeatedly. I think it is quite the ideal distance for a ride," Mrs. Thayer concluded.

But in fact they never saw the place again. That night the weather broke. The steady beating of the rain wakened Miss Varley more than once, and there was a certain fascination in the sound; a singular exultation in listening to the gusty wailing of the tempest held at bay beyond those canvas walls. It was perhaps rather more singular than agreeable seen by the dull gray light of morning. Mrs. Thayer certainly found it so. By midday she had traversed every shade of feeling comprised between an amiable resignation to the in-

evitable, and a gentle but immovable determination to avoid it. By one o'clock they had struck camp, and half an hour later were safely under cover again—but this time at the Damascus Hotel.

It is a curious old house in its way. "A capital subject to sketch. I should call it a 'Study for a Staircase,' myself," the Major remarked. A quaint confusion of small stone platforms and narrow stairs, where each room opens out upon a different plane, and the safe crossing of the various terraces becomes a cause for congratulation in wet weather; but it was a comfortable old place as well, and one which Mrs. Thayer showed but little inclination to abandon.

"For if I never can take the slightest interest in anything unless I am both warm and dry, and if the stones hurt my feet, and the camels tread upon me—well, *look* as

though they were going to tread upon me, then—and if I hate Jews, what is the use of my going out in this weather, Tom dear? And then you and Constance always see so much more than I do. It's really a waste of energy for me to go myself."

"*J'aime mieux le croire que d'y aller voir.* But unless you are careful you will see Jerusalem with the eye of faith and with that eye alone," Miss Varley answered her on one occasion.

"I like that, when I am the only one, positively the only one of you, who keeps a journal! But you can't expect me to see things and write about them too, and I have filled in everything up to yesterday, Constance. Suppose you tell me what you have seen to-day? To reward you, I will make you a cup of tea. You must be half-frozen, poor child! I declare it makes me shiver even to look out at such weather."



“Oh, it is not raining now. Tom says the weather is clearing up. The clouds are blowing all away to seaward,” said Miss Varley, carelessly, walking over to the window as she spoke. “But, oh Fanny, you ought to have seen the sunset from the roof of the Armenian Convent! We have been up there for the last hour or more, exploring; going into chapels, and out upon terraces, and under archways, and across wide empty courts—a place as confused as a dream. When we had lost ourselves for the third or fourth time we climbed a last staircase, and came suddenly out upon a crowd of Greek pilgrims, women and girls, all dressed in white, with beautiful, sad faces—such faces, Fanny!—and still, dark eyes. There must have been a hundred of them at least, sitting in groups along the parapet, waiting for some service to begin; and behind them such a sunset—a great, shining sky of gold.

It was like——” She hesitated. “It was like my child-idea of heaven, I think.”

“Ah yes.”

Mrs. Thayer poked the fire, drew her furs closer about her, and leaned more luxuriously back in her chair. “Well, go on; and before that?”

“Oh, we had merely been wandering about, looking for a walk. Down the Via Dolorosa, by the house of Pilate, through the bazaars. You know how I delight in these old streets. Somehow it seems a perfect revelation to me that Jerusalem should be *picturesque*. And we have been in wonderful places—sombre and arched and vaulted passages; ways where the light cut through the shadows like——”

“Like the pavement through one’s boots?”

“Well—admitted!” laughing; “but then I console myself for that by looking on these

stones as on the very 'rocks of offence—for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.' But never mind that. After awhile we found ourselves in that sunken courtyard before the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It was late, and the place was almost empty ; no image-sellers ; not more than a dozen bead-merchants ; not even a——"

"Then Tom did not get my rosary, after all ?"

"Tom was not there."

"I beg your pardon. I thought you said you *both*——"

"I meant Mr. Stuart and myself," said Constance.

"Ah yes. I see."

A pause.

"And was it with Tom or with Jack that you went to your heavenly convent, then ?"

“With Mr. Stuart. Why?”

“Oh—nothing. I merely ask for information’s sake, you know.”

Miss Varley was silent for a moment. When she next spoke it was with a somewhat quickened voice, with somewhat heightened colour on her cheek. “As far as that goes, Mr. Stuart and I have been alone nearly all the afternoon. Tom left us at the first bazaar. I had not the slightest idea that you would mind our going on without him, and so—— Why, Fanny, it was for you—for your crosses—that Tom went. He said you told him——”

Mrs. Thayer smiled—a peculiar smile. “Well! It is of no great consequence, fortunately. There is really no one we need care for here; and, at the very worst, they could only mistake you and Jack for——” She checked herself with a suggestive laugh. “Well, and afterwards?

For you really have told me nothing for the journal yet."

"But Mr. Stuart——"

"I positively can't put him in again; nor the weather. Tom insisted last night my journal read like a meteorological report of Jack's proceedings already," said Fanny, plaintively. And Miss Varley went on with her story. It had been late in the day when the two had wandered into the church. Coming out of the cheerless afternoon into that close, warm, silent darkness, they had groped their way along—lured by the sound of distant music—until they reached the Russian portion of the edifice. Some brilliant and peculiar service was being performed. From three to four hundred pilgrims knelt upon the ground, each with a lighted taper in his hand; incense was pulsing out in clouds of pale blue smoke; the sound of music poured from out the

chapel-door; the myriad candles rose and fell in flickering lines of flame, as their bearers stood or knelt to the mournful chanting of the priests. It was a wonderful, magical effect.

Standing aside, and in the shadow, Miss Varley watched the crowd stream down the chapel-steps—a long procession of figures—men, women, children, clad in strange garments, in cumbrous furs, all speaking of the North. And in each hand there was a sacred light; and on each face there shone a wild and fervent faith.

“They were peasant-faces,” she said; “dull faces, deadened by poverty, grown old and hard in dreary acceptance of privation and pain. But, as we stood there, I thought of what that moment was to them; I thought of the place this pilgrimage would hold in their memory—the one poem, the one

emotion, the supreme flowering of all those barren years of toil ; I looked at the uncouth, misshapen feet, at the poor rough hands deformed by daily drudgery ; I thought of all the steps that had been taken, of all the weary days and nights those men had wandered on—poor human things, ignorant, superstitious, despised—thousands upon thousands of them crossing the bitter steppes of Russia, the swollen rivers, the dreaded unfamiliar sea ; giving up country, home, life even, to stand upon the spot where One has stood to whom all men were equal, all sorrow was sacred, all suffering was familiar. They were only a handful of Russian peasants ; but, Fanny, I looked at them and I thought of the way in which *we* entered Jerusalem, and it made me—oh, it made me ashamed to be alive !”

She had risen and gone to the window

again—a tall slim figure, seen against the twilight gray—the light lingering a little upon her clasped white hands, upon the pure and earnest face. There was a moment's silence in the room, and then Mrs. Thayer moved uneasily, and coughed a little dry cough, and spoke.

“I think we ought to be upon our guard against being too much taken by these foreign ceremonies, Constance. You know what dear old Dr. Adams used to say: ‘If the Catholic Church could only be clearly separated——’”

“It is not that! It is not—— Oh Fanny, can't you understand? It is not that they are Catholics or Greeks; it is not that they belong to any one Church; it is the faith—the belief—the spirit of it all! Some of them have been a year upon the way. Think of what that means—a year. And they are coming always—thousands of



them. Coming from north and south ; people of different race, of different nature, of different life ; and all coming *here*, and all moved by one common impulse of adoration, by one common sorrow, by one great common need of hope, and pity, and love."

She crossed the room quickly and knelt down beside Fanny's chair. "It is like finding a new horizon. It makes all life seem larger—one's own life smaller," she said.

But Mrs. Thayer only looked at her with gentle wonder. "I don't think I care particularly about discussing such subjects myself. I always think they have all been settled for us by people who knew much more about it than we possibly can," she said, with all the mild conviction of a woman who never missed attending church except in the severest weather, and wore "appro

priate" bonnets in Lent. And then, after a moment's pause: "Jack is quite right. I never saw anyone look so well in a heavy cloak as you do, Constance. I think it suits your figure, you know," she added cheerfully.

But Miss Varley did not answer. The last gleam faded from off the gray old city at her feet; here and there some jewel-like spot of flame began to shine through the gray monotony of twilight; it was all so still that she could even hear the slow dropping of the rain from off the eaves. The gray clouds drifted slowly to the sea, she pressed her forehead wearily against the window-pane, and her thoughts followed them out with a familiar longing—a new and passionate regret.

Conversation at *table d'hôte* that night went on very much in the usual way.

"Cook tourists? oh dear me, no! Only

fancy, Maggie, this gentleman thought we belonged to Cook?" said a thin, dark-haired, and vivacious young lady of some five-and-thirty years to a stolid English maiden sitting by her side. And the young person addressed as Maggie looked up with a fine disdain. "We are travelling under the escort of Mr. Gaze. We are a select party. And Gaze is very genteel," she remarked calmly.

"Ah, I see. It must be very pleasant to be select," said Major Thayer, gently. "I am afraid I should find it rather trying myself, particularly with my plebeian tastes, for *I* delight in Cook. I envy all the 'personally-conducted' people I meet. And I found a prophecy about them the other day—it is in Isaiah: 'For the multitude of thy strangers shall be like small dust, and the multitude of terrible ones shall be as chaff that

passeth away.' Rather neat, I thought, considering."

"My *dear* Tom!" from Mrs. Thayer, in parenthesis.

And at that, old Mr. McMoon—the same elderly, smoke-dried, gray-haired Scotchman whom they had met at Jaffa: the man Miss Varley had nicknamed "Lunar Caustic"—old Mr. McMoon then, looked up with something of a twinkle in his dull gray eyes. "You have no heard my story yet, I'm thinking," he said, speaking with great deliberation. "I was a Cookite myself in the beginning—we have all been monkeys once, you know—but I left them at the second camp. 'Will ye no come and join us at our friendly chants this evening, Mr. McMoon?' says the head man to me. 'It is our custom here to praise the Lord with pipe and tabor as we move along towards Zion,' says he. 'As we go

where?' says I. 'Towards Zion; towards the Heavenly City,' says he, getting rather red in the face. 'Very sorry, but I'm afraid there has been some mistake. I'll complain about it at the office when I get back, for I see my ticket has only been made out for *this* world,' I said. And the next morning I left them."

Mrs. Thayer and Constance exchanged glances. "You don't really expect us to believe that?" said Miss Varley, laughing.

"It's a fact, my dear madam, I do assure you. And there was another young fellow there—a harmless, feckless sort of laddie—who went about in hunting trim; so they gave him the pick of the horses when we left Jaffa. 'And why don't you come on and try a wee bit canter, then?' I asked him when we had been riding for a mile or two. 'Oh Mr. McMoon,' said he, 'some-

one has been meddling with my boots, and I've lost one spur, and I don't like to touch him up with the other,' said he. 'Why, man alive,' said I, 'just you make one side of your horse canter and never fash yourself but the other side will follow fast enough,' I told him."

"I saw you at the Holy Sepulchre to-day," said the young curate opposite, leaning forward rather suddenly, and speaking across the table with an elaborate air of not hearing this last anecdote. "I saw you at the Holy Sepulchre this afternoon, with your brother."

Mrs. Thayer looked up from her plate and smiled.

"I—yes, I was there," said Constance, shortly.

"I think I overheard your brother asking for the exact——"

"I beg your pardon, but Mr. Stuart is not my brother."

"Oh, ah, really! I beg your pardon I'm sure, but I thought—I did not know—and seeing you always together I imagined——"

"Have you decided whether we start to-morrow, Fanny?" said Miss Varley, speaking in a very clear and incisive way.

Mrs. Thayer smiled again and looked down. "I—no really, I don't know," she answered very gently. "Perhaps—don't you think you had better ask Mr. Stuart?"

And then after dinner they all go back again to the Thayers' rooms, high up among the gray and crowded roofs. A lamp is already burning on the table when they enter. There is a heaped-up fire in the open grate. Fanny is always a chilly little soul; she

crosses straight over to the fireplace now, and nestles down beside it, holding up her small, thin, white hands to screen her face. "Your cigarettes are on the mantelpiece behind you, Tom," says Constance, turning round with a lighted candle in each hand. An ample abundance of light is a requisite of happiness for Mis Varley. "And I——By Jove! if we start off to-morrow I *must* write to the governor to-night," says Jack with a smothered groan.

Four years ago Mr. Stuart, having in some mysterious fashion successfully fulfilled the inscrutable requirements of a university examination, delighted his family and surprised himself by acquiring the undisputed right of attaching the letters B.A. as an honourable distinction, a qualifying and classifying appendix, to his name. And this, after some thirty minutes of



laborious silence, is the letter he entreats Miss Varley to read :

“Damascus Hotel, Jerusalem,  
March 25, 187—.

“MY DEAR FATHER,

“Yours of the 27th ult. came safely to hand, at Cairo. Thanks for your offer of increasing the sum. For the present I have more than enough, but will draw upon you at Damascus, as you suggest, should I find my expenses increasing. We reached Jerusalem safely last Monday week, and have been seeing sights ever since. I called on old Mr. Thurlow and gave him your letter, but the son is away at present, and the matter will have to wait over until his return. This will explain to you——”

“Oh, all that is nothing. Go on ; that part is only business,” said Jack.

“——explain to you any delay which may arise. Tell mother Jerusalem is a larger place than she would expect to find. And, by-the-way, exchange is lower here than at Beyrout. It stands on the summit of a broad irregular mountain range. It has a very dreary and desolate aspect. White rocks project on every side from the scanty soil, except where there is a fountain, or a dusky olive rears up its round top and casts its dark shadow on the ground. The city is very badly built, and the pavement beastly. How sad is the contrast between former glory and present misery. Clusters of tottering houses, in bad repair, and filthy lanes occupy the building site of Solomon's gilded halls and Herod's marble——”

“You don't think it sounds a little, just

a little, as though you had been reading 'Murray,' Mr. Stuart?"

"Oh, I don't think the governor objects to 'Murray,'" says Jack, with perfect seriousness.

"——and Herod's marble courts. Yesterday we went to see the wailing of the Jews. It was very amusing. We also visited the Mosque of Omar."

"The Mosque of Omar. There. That is what stopped me. I thought you might give me an idea or two about it. Just enough to fill up this half-page, you know," says Jack.

Now, among all the wonderful and suggestive sights in this most wonderful and suggestive of cities, surely that very Mosque of Calif Omar is the crown. Those outer

walls, covered with Persian tiles, cream-white and blue; that thick and bursting tracery of bud and leaf and blossom, which binds the pale-gray dome; the broad flagged walks; the wide, green, flower-sweet stillness of the place, beneath the swaying cypress-trees—I question if Miss Varley had forgotten a single detail of all that proud and joyous pageant. But the magic of beauty lies within. For every window is sombre, yet luminous and glowing—a mass of crushed jewels, through which the sunlight filters to the floor. And all about that dome—resplendent with gold and green and blue, deep as the inner petal of an iris-flower, clear as the transparent depth, the pale-green light of a wave, and coiling, serpent-wise, about the arch—there runs a tracery of mysterious characters, a strange and splendid writing on the wall. And underneath this lies a barren hill-top, a

naked mountain summit—the Holy Place made sacred to another race of men.

“About the Mosque of Omar? No. I’m afraid I cannot think of anything — suitable,” Miss Varley answers slowly.

There is a folding case of photographs lying face downwards on the table, and as the girl speaks she turns it over mechanically, then looks long and earnestly at the faces it contains. It is only another version of the same family circle you will find in the first collection of portraits which chances to come your way. There is nothing particularly new or striking in any of the personalities which it suggests, and yet Miss Varley looks attentively at them all—at the elderly lady in black, with the firm-set mouth—(“That’s an awful thing of mother, but fair people always photograph badly, you know.”)—at the pretty girl

with the elaborate coiffure dating some two years back; at the banker's shrewd and handsome features, so oddly reproduced in such quaint miniature in the half-grown boy by his side. "That is not bad of little Jim," says Fanny, carelessly, coming up and looking over Miss Varley's shoulder; "Jim looks like you, I think."

"Oh, Jim has got the governor's nose, worse luck for him," says Jack, complacently, with a half-glance at the tarnished mirror which decorates the wall.

"Three or four photos and an empty place. I must give you one of mine, Jack, to fill up. Or is that place reserved for the future Mrs. Stuart?" asks Fanny, looking up with a smile. It is some few years now since the general unaccountability of woman's actions has ceased to preoccupy

Major Thayer. And yet more than once that evening he catches himself silently wondering what the deuce there was in that remark to make Constance blush ?

## CHAPTER IV.

### GOING TO JERICHO.

‘But if you really want to know——’

“You know that I really do.”

“And are perfectly sincere about it?”

“Perfectly so.”

“Well, in that case, I should advise you—to—oh, to ask her the question yourself,” said Mrs. Thayer, coolly, looking up in her companion’s face with a provoking little laugh.

It was two hours or more since they had left Jerusalem. It had been early morning still as they sallied forth from the city-gate,



a long confused line of gaily-caparisoned horses, and stolid, baggage-laden mules ; the sun shining here and there on the long matchlocks of the Arab escort, or on the fluttering curtain of Fanny's palanquin—and since then the barren road had wound steadily, stonily down. The first freshness of the day died as they crossed the rosy cloud of blossoms about Bethany. Since then the landscape had grown strangely, monotonously arid—a desolate mountain-side—gray stones, gray skies, and fields whose scanty covering hardly veiled the rock, with here and there a patch of burning red, where the crimson flame of the anemones cast a glory about this pale and sterile land. It was two hours or more since they had left Jerusalem. It was two hours or more since Mr. Stuart had ridden on by the side of Fanny's litter. And still he spoke of Constance.

“I don’t pretend to know more about women than any other man”—(Mrs. Thayer smiled)—“but a fellow can’t knock about the world as long as I have without finding out a thing or two for himself; and I can assure you, Constance is by no means like any other girl,” the young man went on with simple earnestness, quite unmindful of the look of suppressed amusement shining in his listener’s clear brown eyes. “I don’t think I ever saw anyone like her before; so proud, so independent, so wilful, and then so gentle with it all. And she is so full of fun, and so clever, and bright; and then, all at once—while you are talking to her, perhaps—there will come a look into her face as though she had forgotten all about you, as though she did not even hear your voice, or as if she were listening to some other voices calling her from far off; and that will be, perhaps, just when you are

trying to be most pleasant, and then, just as you have decided, she has the saddest face you ever saw in your life—why then she turns around and begins laughing at you for being so grave, until—until you think—until, by Jove! you don't know what to think, you know."

"I am afraid the front mule has caught his foot through one of those loose straps. I think he is going a little lame. Would you mind making sure of it, Jack?" said Mrs. Thayer with perfect gravity.

"And then she is so kind, so careful of the people about her. You do not know the trouble she takes, Fanny, but I know it, for I have seen it. But if you should speak to her about it—that is quite another thing. It is an accident, or you have been mistaken, or perhaps she will only laugh at you for noticing it at all. Now there was yesterday, for instance——"

"I wonder if it would be *quite* impossible to make them step more together, Jack? If you would only speak to Saïd—I am sure—— Thanks! that is better so. And now, you may go on with your anecdotes now, if you like," said Mrs. Thayer, in a sleepy voice.

But Mr. Stuart was silent. "Don't be absurd now, Jack," said Fanny carelessly, a moment later.

The road had taken a sudden turn to the left, one after the other they could see the scattered horsemen gaining the top of the opposite ravine. "Don't be absurd now, Jack. This weather is really too hot to make it worth one's while to get offended. And then you must remember this is not exactly the first time I hear you indulging in a little harmless sentiment. There was that Schuyler girl, for instance—was it last winter, now,

or was it only this spring—I heard you rave about——”

“Oh, bother that Schuyler girl!” said Mr. Stuart, hotly.

“Ah, well, I never could see much in her myself, you know. But then I don’t believe in discussing other people’s tastes. It is generally safer not to discuss what you mean to oppose,” Mrs. Thayer rejoined calmly. “But as for this last fancy of yours, I’ll tell you what it is,” cried Fanny in a sudden, artless burst of confidence, “I’ll tell you what it is, Jack—I’m going to give you a piece of excellent advice—don’t try and get up a flirtation with Constance. For, in the first place, you could not do it, you know; and, in the next place, I should not allow it; and in the next—— Look here, Jack. I am going to be perfectly frank with you. I am not going to have Constance vexed or

troubled, or her pleasure spoiled by any such nonsense as *that*. And then, on your own account, my dear boy——”

“You are very good. But it does not strike you—stand still there, will you!—it does not strike you that all this anxiety may be just a trifle premature? I don’t presume to say anything about Miss Varley, of course; but as for myself, I never found any very great difficulty in looking after my own affairs hitherto, and—and——that is a pretty bit of view over there, Fanny, do you see?”

“Very pretty.”

“Do you happen to know, have you the slightest idea where Hassan intends to give us lunch to-day?”

“Not the slightest.”

“I—I——Oh, confound it all! I should like to know what I have done that you should treat me so,” the young man burst

out with sudden passion; "you who always called yourself my friend! If I *am* in a scrape I would like to know who brought me here And I did not—no, I did not—think you would throw me over in this way just when I needed your help the most," he said, with a curious break in his voice, a curious look of trouble clouding his handsome sunburned face.

Have you ever tried to realise for yourself the feelings of a small but active spider, towards yonder large and fatuous bluebottle drawing nearer and nearer in ever-lessening circles to the puzzling, shining web—the fine contempt, the delightful thrill of anticipated triumph, the unhesitating recognition of the beneficent intentions of nature, of the great moral law so unmistakably expressed in the relative positions of spider and fly? I believe Mrs. Thayer understood it all at that moment.

It is true that we have every reason to suppose that the spiders are less preoccupied with the bluebottle's sensations than with their own.

Fanny was keenly conscious of rendering the most praiseworthy, the most vital assistance possible to the furtherance of the ultimate ends of Providence; her mind was filled with a quiet pleasure, her face with the friendliest, kindest light. It was with quite a new sense of gratified power, with quite a new confidence in her own perspicacity that she said suddenly :

“Did you ever meet Mr. Stuyvesant, of Newport? You cannot expect me to quarrel with you, Jack. That's a thing I won't even do for Tom. Of course I can't help it if you choose to resent my sympathy and call it patronage. As I said before, there is no accounting for the fluctuations



of a man's taste. But, did you ever happen to meet Mr. Stuyvesant?"

"Morris Stuyvesant, you mean? Little man, with curly hair, who keeps a yacht and drives four-in-hand in the park? Yes, I know him. He banks with us. Why?"

"I never saw him. What is he like?" said Fanny, eagerly.

"Very much like anybody else, I suppose, except that he has more money. I don't know much about him. He belongs to quite another set from mine," the young man said impatiently. "But I wonder you haven't seen him. He is rather dull, I think—a typical heavy swell—and very fast, and enormously wealthy. And there isn't a woman in New York to-day who has not, at some time, tried to get him to marry someone—herself or somebody else. It's the one creditable thing I've ever

heard of him, by Jove! to think that they have not succeeded yet."

"Constance would not marry him," said Mrs. Thayer.

"Constance—— Well, I don't know," said Mr. Stuart, bluntly, "women are — women, all the world over, I suppose." It was curious to note how the likeness to his father came out and deepened as he spoke. It was like a prophecy—a palpable foreshadowing of all the shrewd, ordinary, undeniable convictions with which the years were to limit and bind about his life. "Women are — women, I suppose; and Stuyvesant is awfully rich."

"So Mrs. Van Ness told me; and the story is no secret in any way. Everybody knew it down at Nahant, last summer. It was while I was ill, you know, and Constance was visiting Aunt Van. Sometimes I have thought if *I* had been there—

but no ! I daresay it would have been of absolutely no avail," she added, with a perfectly unaffected sigh. "But Aunt Van was something perfectly awful. You don't know Mrs. Van Ness, Jack. Ah, well, it would be difficult for you to understand it then."

"You don't mean to say—stand *still*, you brute, when I tell you to !—you don't mean to say, Fanny, that Morris Stuyvesant actually had the effrontery, the—the cheek to ask Constance—to ask Miss Varley to marry him !"

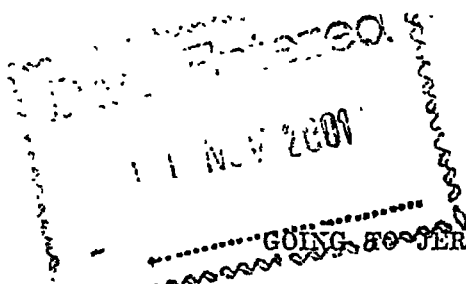
"It *was* a compliment, I know," said Mrs. Thayer, gravely. "It was quite the match of the season. And Aunt Van was so unhappy about it all ! When Aunt Van is unhappy she has a way of saying 'my dear,' which is simply paralysing. You feel that your life is merely a wicked mistake. And then she will sit a whole

evening without speaking, looking at you and thinking about you until you wish you were dead. And every now and then there comes one small tear into the corner of her pale, porcelain eyes. Constance says it is like drawing water from a rock; you feel as though you had interfered with the economy of nature."

"And he—he actually asked Constance to marry him!" said Jack, between his teeth.

"Oh dear yes; such a scene. 'Why won't you marry him, Constance?' 'Because I don't care to, auntie dear.' 'And why don't you care to then, when it is your duty, your manifest duty, to be down on your knees thanking Providence and your old aunt for what they have done for you?' And so on. I'm not sure they did not call in the clergyman. I know there was an appeal to the

authorities at home. I never quite understood that part of it myself," added Fanny, thoughtfully. "Captain Varley is always uneasy about money. I should have thought he would have brought his influence to bear, and I am not generally mistaken in such matters." But, indeed, in this case Mrs. Thayer was only partly right, Captain Varley being one of the many people in whom that complaint of poverty is like the muscular contraction of a snake—a mere mechanical indication of past anguish, an appearance which endures long after its cause has passed away. But Mrs. Thayer was partly right, as usual. For it is a subject of no small wonderment to the present writer to reflect upon the unbewildered accuracy with which a limited mind can detect and estimate the paltriest motives which influence its noblest fellow-men. One wonders at times if there *could*



be any impulse so unworthy as to escape the instant recognition of one's friends.

"I never quite understood that part of it myself," said little Fanny, thoughtfully. "But it was a splendid offer—a splendid opportunity—wasted. Has Constance ever regretted it? I do not know. She is—the Varleys are <sup>another</sup> curious, in a way—quixotic, romantic; I hardly know how to call it, but odd, decidedly. And Constance is very like her father in that. You should see the woman Captain Varley has married, Jack! And I think she was quite capable of caring for him, and yet refusing him for some inscrutable reason of her own. Perhaps she was too proud. Perhaps—I have known hundreds of girls in my time, hundreds of them, but I never knew even one who was not a perfect little fool about matters of that kind,"



said Mrs. Thayer, with an air of profound conviction.

They rode on for several moments in silence. It was now nearly eleven o'clock. The heat had grown intense. For the last hour the road had been steadily growing more wild and more deserted, winding higher and higher among the fastnesses of the bleak and crumbling rock. The sky was colourless and blank and very low ; a sky of brass ; one wide, white, blinding glare, beating pitilessly down upon this arid wilderness of stone. The heavy silence of the noon lay all around. One by one the white-cloaked horsemen of the escort had ridden silently forward and disappeared among the rocks, and now there was no living thing in sight but the covered and curtained litter crawling slowly along the narrow mountain-trail. And the mules rattled their betasseled harness ; Mr.

Stuart's horse picked his way cautiously among the rolling stones, and chafed and champed impatiently against his bit. From behind the palanquin there rose a slow and wailing chant, the melancholy, monotonous song of the Arab muleteer; it seemed the very voice and expression of all this dead and silent and shadowless land.

The mules rattled their betasseled harness, the palanquin shifted round and lurched heavily to one side. "Oh, have we got there at last? but I think I have been asleep," said Fanny, waking up with a start.

And this was the moment Mr. Stuart chose to make the following surprising proposition.

"I have been thinking," the young man said gloomily—and indeed it was undeniable that he had been most unusually pre-occupied for several moments past—"I



have been thinking that I will not go any farther with you than Jerusalem.

Mrs. Thayer was silent.

"It is not as though you could not all get on perfectly well without me, for I am merely an addition—a postscript, as it were—to the original party, you know."

And still Mrs. Thayer did not speak.

"Now there were those fellows I was talking to last week," the young man went on, in a rather less decided way, "they asked me to join them in the Lebanon. And Hassan tells me there is still a little shooting left. And—and if I took the next steamer to Beyrout——"

And then Mrs. Thayer looked up at him with a smile. "I don't think I should go if I were you, Jack," she said, in her clearest voice. She leaned a little farther out of her litter, and laid her hand affectionately upon his arm. "You absurd boy!

But if you care so much to know what Constance thought of him, why don't you ask her the question yourself?" she said, with great good-humour.

And even as she spoke the road turned sharply to the left; a group of picketed horses stood in the midst of the small platform before them; farther on some men were boiling their coffee and smoking about a fire; they had reached the midday encampment, and already Constance was coming lightly forward to welcome them to its narrow strip of shade. Mr. Stuart looked at her with a curious mingling of question and surprise. It seemed to him that he had never really seen her before. He thought of Fanny's story; but no! how was it possible to associate any idea of disappointment or regret with the glance of those clear blue eyes, with that frank and happy smile?

There was only a narrow strip of shade under the crumbling walls of the deserted khan, and as Constance took her place at lunch all the light from the wide open sky seemed reflected in her face, and in the loose and shining masses of her hair.

“And without even a hat, and with your complexion! Oh Constance, how burnt you will be!” said Fanny, in lazy remonstrance.

Miss Varley laughed. “Don’t allude to by-gones, dear. I was fair once, I know; but that was before we went to Egypt. For now—look, Mr. Stuart”—she pushed back the sleeve of her riding-habit above her wrist—“look here.”

“Do you believe that *can* be a bit of myself? or is it a case of mistaken identity?” she said, laughing, and holding out her hand.

“Yes, I see,” said Jack, absently, still

keeping his eyes fixed upon her face. And then, after a moment, "I—I beg your pardon. I am afraid I did not quite understand what you were saying?" And, indeed, the young fellow was in a singular state of mental perturbation, and excitement, and doubt. "The boy is looking quite upset. What have you been doing to him, Fanny?" Major Thayer inquired, pausing in the act of lighting his cigar, and looking curiously at his cousin striding away. But Mrs. Thayer only laughed. Syria was hotter, decidedly hotter, than Egypt, she observed, with cheerful irrelevance.

The men had laid aside their empty nargilehs, the mules were once more harnessed to the litter, rugs were being rolled, and saddle-girths tightened for the descent, before Mr. Stuart joined the others once more. As he came sauntering up, the

Major was pointing out the road to his wife—that road by which a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves.

“I believe this may have been the very inn; or, at least, the site is the same,” said Fanny, with enthusiasm. “Look at its position, crowning the ridge, on the very pinnacle of the pass, overlooking all the plain. Tom, I believe this is the place. I know it is. If dear old Dr. Adams were only here! And—— Oh, here’s Jack!”

But Jack had passed on. “What are you looking at, Miss Varley?” he asked, abruptly, going up and leaning his arms on the broken parapet beside her, and staring down into the depths of the ravine.

The girl smiled and pointed with her whip. “You see those flowers there?”

No, farther down; on that little ledge where the wall is broken? I was considering the lilies of the field. They are the first ones we have seen. And quite out of reach."

"Ah, yes. I see. Yes, they are out of reach," said Stuart.

But half an hour afterward—as the road grew more abrupt, Miss Varley heard a clattering of horse's hoofs pressing nearer and nearer, and presently someone rode up and held out a handful of half-withered flowers. "There—there are your lilies," said Jack.

Constance started and looked round, and then the colour rushed to her cheeks. "Oh Mr. Stuart! But you should not have done it—indeed you should not."

"Oh, that was not anything at all," the young man said carelessly. "I'm not a bad hand at climbing. And I knew you

wanted them. And I thought—I thought perhaps you might give me one of them—to keep,” he added, with an embarrassed laugh, and leaned forward and stroked his horse carefully between the ears.

She looked at him a moment in silence—a grave, inquiring look, which sent a curious thrill of excitement through him—and then an expression of great friendliness and liking came into her face; she gave him the flower without a word. She gave him the flower, and for one instant he touched her gauntleted hand, and he saw her blue eyes looking into his.

“Thank you,” he said, beneath his breath. Half unconsciously he lifted his hat, with a curious feeling of doing her homage, as he reined in his horse to let her pass him by.

Now Stuart was nothing more than an honest, good-natured, rather self-indulgent,

rather talkative young fellow, you might object—a perfectly commonplace character, incapable, in all probability, of any great passion; unvisited as yet by any deep or vital experience of life; a character, too, which the budding germs of a latent Philistinism—the barren blight of common sense—would alone have debarred from any claim to consideration as a hero of romance. And yet, was there ever a day so prosaic or so dull that some subtle stirring of colour in the morning sky, some rosy revelation of the dawn, has not linked it to all the infinite possibilities of beauty? or ever a life too indifferent to all joy not to feel and stir in the blossom-time of its experience—the brief, warm, heyday of its youth?

It was four o'clock by the time they reached the foot of the hills, and turned their horses across the long and undulating



plain. A fringe of trees, a tall and waving fringe of reeds, lay straight across their track, marking the boundaries of a little stream; and a short, quick canter soon brought them to its ford, where the tangled branches cast their deepest shadow over the rushing, bubbling brook. No words could describe the deep relief of that cool silence—made only the deeper by the low, cool murmur of the water's flow. The riders stopped, or rather, the horses stopped halfway across, drinking greedily, and wading farther and farther up the stream till the water gurgled above their very knees. It was all so still, the little birds in the bushes began to sing once more, fluttering from tree to tree across the brook until the horses would pause for a moment to look around them before plunging their heads in again with deep and eager delight. And then, after some

ten minutes' halt, the little caravan again pressed forward, up the steep side of a hill and along a wide plateau, where the narrow bridle-path wound in and out between the scattered clumps of mimosa trees, until one had to bend to the saddle-bow to escape the clutch of their thorny branches.

And then there came a company of mounted Bedaween; brown-faced, brown-robed, and sullen-eyed marauders; and after them followed a troupe of big brown cows, who scrambled along like goats, stopping at every step to snatch another mouthful of the short, close grass, until the advancing cavalcade alarmed and separated the herd, and they swept by the horses in wild and jostling disorder.

“Exit the noble savage. Do you know those are the first living creatures we have met in all this day?”

“I should be sorry to hurt your feelings, Constance ; I really should. Consequently I will *not* remark that your favourite children of the desert look not unlike a group of Digger Indians,” said Major Thayer, slowly.

“Please God we not lose any chickens to-night,” added Hassan, with a groan.

The handsome sheikh bowed gravely in his saddle. “The will of God be done.”

And now the horses quickened their pace, and threw up their heads and went off in a wild gallop, at sight of the circle of canvas domes. That night the tents were pitched by the side of Elisha’s Well, a little, clear, splashing spring which starts from under a high rock, runs past a fringe of fern and flowers for a few hundred feet, and then disappears again underground. And soon its tinkling lift and fall was the only

touch of coolness left. For with sunset the heat grew more intense; the wind became more sultry; wild gusts of dust and sand came whirling whitely down across the stony platform from the hill-side above it; and now the sky was of a threatening sulphurous tone, and lurid gleams of light broke through the heavy clouds, throwing a curious reddish glow over all the green tangle of branches beneath.

As Miss Varley came out of her tent and looked about her, the very air seemed to have grown thick with this suffused yellow light. Nature was in suspense. There was a feeling of suppressed horror in the livid light, in the wild shifting of the clouds, in the low ominous muttering of thunder dying away among the naked hills.

And as the night grew darker this sense of unrest and expectation deepened.

“It is like the moment before a miracle . . . like waiting for some revelation,” Constance said. And indeed the very animals about the camp had caught the infection of terror and disquiet; the horses refused to eat, and stood facing the wind with wildly-streaming manes; and even Lione thrust his golden head between Miss Varley’s hands and moaned and struggled in his sleep.

It was almost a relief after dinner when this tension of silence was broken by a succession of savage cries—a wild, high-pitched, rattling call, like the voice of some animal grown fierce and unfamiliar with pain. And “There is some Bedawy, ladies and gentlemen,” said Hassan, pushing back the door of the tent. “And the chief he come down to do you honour and show you one dance.”

And presently the chairs and rugs had all

was carried outside. A long line of men were drawn up in front of the dining-tent; at one end a shadowy group of veiled women and children stood back awaiting their turn; and before them, the old sheikh of the tribe, with a drawn sword in his hand. As the travellers came out he began his dance, accompanied by the howls and cries of all the spectators, and marked by a certain rude rhythm kept by the clapping of hands. It was a singular and exciting performance; for as the words of the chant were changed the chief would vary his action, now charging the whole line with a flashing sweep of his sword; now crouching to the ground as if in ambush, or again throwing himself at their feet and writhing as if wounded unto death. And after every change he would come rushing up to Major Thayer, circle his sword about his head, and again that wild and rattling

chorus would start the sleeping echoes of the hill. The two long white cotton lanterns shook in the wind, casting long curious shadows, wild unexpected gleams of light, upon those savage shapes. Fanny had fallen asleep in her chair; her husband had long since strolled away. As Stuart lay stretched out upon the Persian carpet at Miss Varley's feet and looking up into her face, they two seemed, to the young man's excited fancy, the only possessors of a new and fantastic world; a world peopled by shadowy, swaying forms, full of strange sounds, of warm and sudden wind—full, too, of a pale and misty moonlight, of vague and enervated and measureless delight. And Constance?

He was lying, I have said, at her feet; but not all the width of the universe, had he but known it, could have held those two farther apart.

For Miss Varley, too, was thinking. And as, later on, she lay upon her bed, tossing restlessly from side to side, it seemed those thoughts had well-nigh banished sleep. The wind had loosened the fastenings of her tent-door. Presently she rose to tighten the cords, and as she did so, some sudden impulse made her pause and push aside the curtain and look out. The moon had risen high above the clouds; a great, an infinite silvery stillness lay all about the sleeping camp. From their stony platform she looked down upon a waving sea of tree-tops—a love-gift once to Cleopatra from Mark Antony, and now a dark and rustling solitude where only the night wind seemed awake. But as the girl stood there at the door of her tent, the wind lifting her loosened hair from off her forehead, blowing softly and coolly about her small bare feet



—of a sudden, there arose a sweet delicious gurgle of sound from among the tangled bushes. It was the voice of a nightingale, singing to the silence and to the stars. And as she listened, a change swept over the grave proud face, her lips parted, her eyes grew soft and filled with tears. She lifted her face imploringly, with a sudden gesture of passionate emotion.

“Oh my love,” she said, “my love, when—when are you coming back to me?”

## CHAPTER V.

### SHOWING WHY MISS VARLEY LOOKED AT THE STARS.

It was when Constance Varley first began to have her frocks lengthened, her lessons shortened, and her opinion more or less consulted in regard to both—she was, in a word, about fifteen years old—when an event took place which merits to be briefly mentioned.

It was at the close of morning school, and a certain riotous stillness was beginning to make itself apparent among the young ladies of the Misses de Walker's French and

Family Finishing Establishment. A subdued sound of opening desks, the furtive rustling of contraband paper parcels, a mysterious and increasing succession of smothered laughs, were all witnesses to the absence of any high authority. Matters were evidently approaching a crisis—delayed for a moment as all the heads were lifted, and all eyes turned to watch the servant bringing a message to the door.

“The young ladies will please give a little attention. Silence there on the left! Young ladies, I must really beg you to be a little more respectful,” said Miss Smith, looking up, flushed and wearied, from a chaotic pile of accounts. “Miss Morgan and Constance Varley are wanted in the parlour.” And then, as Constance passes her, “I think it is your father, my dear,” the governess adds in kindly preparation. For it is a well-known fact that Constance

adores her father. She has seen him perhaps a dozen times in all her life—brief visits snatched in the interval between each cruise—and has already lavished an amount of ardent hero-worship, of unquestioning admiration upon her idealised recollection of him, which cannot but give a colouring and bent to all her after years.

“And you are never going away again, papa ; never, never going away any more ?” she says exultingly a moment later, standing with both hands clasped about her father’s arm ; “you are going to give up the ship at last, and live on that nice half-pay, and have a home in the country. Oh papa, a home in the country for you and me together ? And Fanny shall live with us, of course—Fanny shall live with us always ; but I am to be the housekeeper, you know. Fanny shall be the lady, but I am going to be your helper.”

“And Aunt Van? Have you forgotten Aunt Van?” says Captain Varley, smiling and smoothing back her hair.

“Oh, bother Aunt Van!” answers Constance, gaily. “Papa, I wish you had a better-regulated mind? It is a deplorable thing to be so utterly devoid of seriousness in discussing vital subjects. For listen to me, please. I want some chickens. You may have all the cows and sheep and oxen for your very own, but I must have some chickens—and a horse—and—and what else can people have who are going to live in the real country and be as happy as the day is long?”

And as she asks the questions Fate appears in the doorway to answer it—a dark-haired, deep-eyed Fate, who stops and hesitates, and stands with a pile of loose and fluttering papers in her hand. “I beg

your pardon, I did not know there was any-one here."

"Oh, it is not of the slightest consequence. You have not disturbed us at all," says Fanny, coolly. "Only—— Would you be so very kind as to shut the door carefully as you go out? There is really a terrible draught."

But Constance has already started forward and is taking her destiny by the hand. "Come in, Miss Smith. Do come in," she says in her friendly young voice. "It is only papa, you know. And, papa, this is Miss Smith."

Captain Varley has already risen, and you see at a glance where Constance got that fine upright carriage. "Miss Smith will honour us by making use of the room. I am always happy to see my daughter's friends," he answers with grave courtesy.

“You forget that we are only school-girls yet. We could hardly presume to call ourselves Miss Smith’s friends,” says Fanny in her sweetest voice. “And——”

“Miss Morgan is right. I am only the nursery governess here. I teach the little ones their multiplication-table, and keep the accounts, and hear the young ladies practise, Captain Varley. Miss Morgan is quite right, I am not anybody’s friend,” adds Miss Smith, turning very pale.

Poor Captain Varley turns from one to the other, from his ward to his daughter’s governess, with a puzzled look on his frank and weather-beaten face. And it is curious to notice how you see the expression repeated on the frank young countenance by his side. For, as may already have been remarked, Miss Varley’s views of life are rather more primitive than is usual even with young ladies who

have enjoyed all the opportunities for ignorance offered by a liberal education. "In fact, you made a perfect little goose of yourself, my dear," Miss Morgan informs her later on, in private. "And as for the presumption of that creature in accepting your father's invitation——! I won't go to the theatre with you at all. Yes, I will. I'll go, and do what you have not the sense to do yourself——"

"Poor thing, and why should she not have a little pleasure then?" answers Constance, simply. And indeed why should she not?

Dressed in her best black gown, a bunch of flowers in her hand, a red camellia in her hair—"It is years, years, since anyone has sent me such flowers as these," she says softly, looking up into Captain Varley's face, with a fine expression of gratitude in those great dark eyes, which



not even the Misses De Walker's unpaid bills have yet contrived to tarnish)—dressed, I say, in her best, seated in the front of an opera-box, a handsome man by her side, and all about her a flood of light and music, why should not this poor woman forget for an evening all the disappointments, the regret, it might be, the remorse of her life? For that Miss Smith was a young person with experiences was really an undeniable fact.

“It is a pretty stage seen *from the boxes*, is it not?” asked Fanny, bending forward with a sneer.

Miss Smith is a young woman with a history, and you may be sure her pupils at the Establishment are not unacquainted with the fact. But is she then so very much worse than her neighbours? If the truth must be told it was Fanny herself who was the chief narrator, the

firmest believer in these reports. Indeed, I never could persuade myself that those particular anecdotes were any more worthy of credence than any of the other thousand and one legends which form the daily entertainment of our friends. For how, to take only one instance, how, I ask you, was it probable that Miss Morgan should be so thoroughly versed in all the details about young Winslow's unlucky passion, or the reasons which led to Miss Smith's change of home? As for her having deliberately planned to attract Captain Varley's attention, could it for a moment be believed that such conduct was even possible under the sheltering wing of the Misses De Walker's maternal and Christian care?

“Maternal and Christian fiddlestick!” retorts Fanny with profound contempt. “Miss De Walker is an old cat, and Miss

Philena is another. They take their teachers where they can pay the least, and as for that creature—— Captain Varley is only my guardian, I know. But if he were *my* father, Constance——”

“If he were your father, Fanny—— But we will not talk about that, dear. Only, the king can do no wrong,” said Miss Varley, turning very pale.

And “Our poor Constance is as infatuated as ever, and as blind as even Miss Smith could desire. Indeed, dear Mrs. Van Ness, I fear it will not be very long before I shall see myself forced to take refuge with you. For I fear the catastrophe is even nearer than we think,” Miss Morgan wrote prophetically to a certain old lady at Nahant. It was the one relaxation into strong dislike which Fanny ever allowed herself, and she hated Miss Smith with all

the repressed virulence of a studiously amiable character.

And, indeed, it was not long before her prediction came to pass. It was hardly a month, I think, after that unlucky night at the opera before Miss Varley was wanted in the schoolroom parlour again. The interview was very short, and very quiet until just at the last. "I hope, I do hope you will be happy, papa," the girl cried out with a sudden burst of passion, as her father was bidding her good-bye. She took up his hand in both of hers and laid her cheek against it with a caressing motion that was habitual to her. "You—you won't forget me, dear?" she said very gently. The Captain congratulated himself with honest satisfaction upon the sensible fashion in which his little girl was seconding his plans.

The days went on and on. Captain

Varley was often in town now, but it was seldom he found time to visit his daughter's school. Once they met him walking down the street. He was dressed with scrupulous care in entirely new clothes, and was giving his arm to Miss Smith. Miss Morgan threw up her head at the sight, and would have walked on without speaking, but Constance stopped and insisted upon shaking her future stepmother's hand. It was not for *her* to question her father's choice, the girl thought proudly, choking back her tears. The months went on and on, and brought with them the marriage; went on and on, and now Miss Smith's matrimonial speculation had grown to be an old story, and there were newer and more interesting weddings in view.

"You must come and stay with me this year," wrote young Mrs. Thayer some six months afterwards. "I want you,

Constance—and you will only be in their way at home.” And indeed by this time I think the poor girl was amply conscious of the fact. For this ill-assorted marriage was proving itself a great success to the two most intimately concerned—a success so complete that not even Mrs. Thayer could question its duration.

As for Constance—but whatever Constance felt, we know how she had accepted the situation from the first. And as the years rolled by, and there came other claimants to her father’s love, when baby fingers and baby voices had made the final conquest of his home, I think there even grew to be a certain kindness between Miss Varley and her father’s second wife.

“There’s my good Constance! But I always knew you would behave like a good, sensible girl, my dear,” the Captain remarked to her with genuine pleasure.

And "Yes, papa; I would do anything for you, you know," the girl answered, and caught his hand in hers and laid her cheek against it with a silent caress, with a curious new pang at her heart. The old love was there, the old tenderness was there; but the old passionate admiration, the old ideal, where were they now?

Constance had been a year or more at home—she had grown into a tall, serious-faced, sad-eyed girl of nineteen—before the long-promised visit to Mrs. Thayer came to pass. As she thinks of those days now, they seem the nearest—as, indeed, they are the most vivid—of her life. For it was at Fanny's house, at The Farm, that Constance found the second, the last, the supreme passion of her life. It was a man most unlike her father whom this fond idol-worshipper had now elected to fill the empty temple of her faith, but I think there

was a certain resemblance in the quality of the deep and silent and loyal devotion she lavished upon them both.

It is an old story now, dating some three years back. Indifference, custom, time, new faces, and new lands have come between her and her love. As she stands there listening to the song of that nightingale, looking up at those serene and melancholy stars, how weak, how short, the time and distance seem ! It is evening now again in the old house at home, a mild spring evening of three years before ; she is walking up and down the garden path with the children, and Fanny has written her a letter :

“ Are you not coming back to me soon ? Do come back, there’s a darling, for I really cannot do without you any longer ; and surely Mrs. Varley is well enough to



spare you now? Do come back. We all want you—that is, all but one. ‘And when shall we see you at The Farm again?’ I asked that one, only this morning. ‘Probably never. Who ever heard of a man going to Paradise twice,’ he said, driving off. Pretty, wasn’t it? But then he has a way of saying those pretty things, as you know. And, by-the-way, he left his compliments for *Schön-Rohtrant*, and another message—I have forgotten what. However, that is of the less consequence as I question if we shall see that *beau ténébreux* again. At all events, he has already sailed for Europe. Tom swears it was business which called him away. *I* think he was simply bored; and, indeed, the only wonder is we should have kept that unquiet spirit for so long. Of course the saddest part of it all is the check it gives to our unfortunate play. We are seriously proposing to cast

Jack Stuart for the missing part, and if you will only come back——”

And so on.

“Conny,” said little Walter, plucking curiously at her skirt; “has oo been naughty, Conny? Is oo doin’ to ky?”

She looked at him with a blank, bewildered face. She stooped and loosened the little hands, and walked away without a word. And, indeed, what words could describe the storm of shame and incredulous despair, the wild agony of longing which filled that proud and passionate heart? The coming years might bring their slow-gathering proof of loyalty, but it was at that moment, there in that sunny spring garden among the budding trees, that Constance measured, once for all, the force, the vitality, the depth of this her wasted love.

And presently the brief flickering sunshine faded from off the garden-walks, a face looked out of the window, a servant came to the door, the children went clamorously in to tea, and Constance was alone.

She was alone. It was a mild, warm evening at the end of March. Spring had come, but the snow was still lying in loose white patches in the hollows of the hill, and the air was full of the damp, earthy smell of the freshly-ploughed fields. Presently she paused in her aimless walking and unclenched her hands, smoothed out the crumpled folds of Fanny's letter—it was too dark to read their meaning now—and sat wearily down upon the steps of the porch.

She was very tired. She leaned her head upon her hand; the tears rolled slowly down across her fingers; she never moved to brush them away. She was tired.

From across the road she could hear the chilly tinkle of the thawing brook; a thin white wreath of fog was creeping slowly nearer between the trunks of the apple-trees in the orchard. It seemed to her that she had seen it all before, had lived through it all before, had known it from the very first.

And now it was all over. "I doubt," said Fanny, "if we shall ever see him again." The intolerable weight of time was pressing on her already, and it was not an hour since she knew that he was gone. He was gone, and he had left her "his compliments"! She stood up; a hot flush mounted to her forehead; she pressed her hand against her burning eyes. But no! not even, in that first moment of bitter bewildering pain, not even then would this true heart swerve from its allegiance. And once more the old faith, the old words,

came to her lips : her king could do no wrong.

The pale thin mist came creeping up the path, and the wind blew keen and chill. She shivered. She lifted her face from her hand and looked up, and there, above her head, shining down to her through the leafless branches, she saw a solitary star.

It was an old story of three years before. But as the girl stood at the door of her tent that night, the same wind seemed rustling and whispering through Cleopatra's trees. She listened to the sweet, pierangly sweet rapture of the nightingale ; she lifted up her eyes, and shining through the breaking clouds, far off, and pure and steadfast as her love, she saw a solitary star.

And the nightingale went on singing, singing through the night. The clouds

drifted back and covered the sky, the wind was hushed among the shadowy trees, but the nightingale went on singing till the dawn.

## CHAPTER VI.

### 'CROSS COUNTRY.

AND in the gray of that dawn they started for the river Jordan. The day had broken wan and pale, with no sunrise, only a cold dim light, which seemed to promise rain. But how lovely everything looked about them as they rode away from camp! It was so early the very flowers were still asleep in the grass, and only here and there the first venturesome daisies and buttercups already opened their eyes at the touch of the morning wind; but how beautiful were those far-off mountains which

barred the horizon with a quivering silver light! They alone were resplendent in this gray landscape, under this gray sky; for, after passing the few low ruins of stately Jericho, the travellers rode for hours across a solitary and undulating plain—a plain without grass, or flowers, or trees—only at rare intervals some dense, dark growth of withered-looking shrubs, which seemed clinging with a desperate tenacity to the sandy soil. There was not a living thing in sight; no movement but in the sky, where the great loose masses of gray clouds were carelessly and tumultuously drifting onward to the sea.

But the vegetation became more luxuriant as they approached the river, and close by the water's edge there was a tangled thicket of vine and bush and broad-leaved sycamore-trees, which only parted in one place far enough to show a glimpse of the turbid



and sacred stream—a small and swift and muddy river, serving to fertilise a narrow strip of land lost in the wilderness of Judea.

“So that is the Jordan,” said Major Thayer, after a pause.

“Yes, sir ; Jordan, sir.”

“I wonder—— Now how wide should you say it was, at a guess ?”

“I give it up. Where’s ‘Murray?’”

“I wish, how I do wish Dr. Adams were here ! And I should like to know the precise spot where the Israelites crossed,” said Fanny, with a sigh.

And then they all got off their horses, and Mrs. Thayer asked for her Bible. It had been left in the palanquin ; no, in the tent.

“I am afraid he gone on with the baggage-mules, lady,” said Hassan, in a deprecatory way. And then for a few

moments they all wandered about under the willows and stared at the stream. And the Arabs sat around in a semicircle, and thought—heaven knows what they thought of these Christian dogs.

“Will you have one bath, gentlemen? The most gentlemen what come here they go in the water,” suggested Hassan, with an anxious air.

“A bath? Oh, hang it all, no.”

Mr. Stuart strolled over to where Constance was sitting by the bank. “Stupid river that, I think,” he said, pointing with his whip.

Miss Varley unclosed her eyes, and looked at it for a minute. “It is small,” she assented indifferently, and let her head fall back once more against the tree. She was not looking well this morning. Her face was pale and weary-looking; her eyelids heavy, her lips colourless.

"You look tired," said Jack.

"No ; but perhaps I did not sleep enough." She sat up and opened her eyes, and passed her hand through her hair. "Did you hear that nightingale last night, Mr. Stuart ?"

"Nightingale ? What nightingale ? I did not know there was one," said the young man, in a conversational manner. He took out his knife and cut a carefully-selected branch from one of the willows. "And so there *was* a nightingale ?" he repeated vaguely, and sat down on the bank by her side, and began stripping the bark from off his wand.

Miss Varley turned her head a little, and looked at him and smiled. She slipped the string of amber beads off her wrist and began swinging them slowly to and fro.

"How long—how long life seems on

some days!" she said, looking down on the river at her feet.

A pause.

"Life? Oh—I don't know.—What is the matter with life?—I think it's—very jolly.—Don't you?" answered Jack, slowly. The breaks were when he stopped to contemplate the effect of his work.

"There! I call that a very pretty monogram now," he said, presently, holding it up and gazing at it with a critical eye. "It will make you a very good riding-whip in the place of the one you lost." He twisted the stick about and snapped it two or three times in the air. "Lione! here, Lione! Come here, sir!" But the dog only turned his head round and yawned, and laid his nose upon his paws again, winking with amiable indifference.

"Hassan is filling the bottles; I must fetch you some of the water to drink,"

said Jack, getting up slowly to his feet.

And presently he came scrambling up the bank. "Leave me a little, will you?" he said, bending down and giving her the glass with a smile.

"Thanks."

She touched the water with her lips and then began pouring it slowly out upon the ground.

"Oh, I say, Miss Varley, don't do that? Why, I brought it for you to drink?"

"If you will look at the dust on the leaves of that unlucky plant——"

"But I want some water myself," said Stuart, quickly, and laid a detaining hand upon her wrist.

Constance was very tall. Their two faces were nearly on a level. The young man was looking straight into her blue eyes, and there was something defiant,

almost hard, in their expression. He had never seen that look before. "Let me go, Mr. Stuart."

"And you will give me the water then?"

She hesitated; she looked at the ground and then out at the river; and then her eyelids drooped and there came a sudden flush across her face. It was the second time that Stuart had made her feel conscious. "There, take it, please, and let me go," she said in a low voice, and there was nothing in her tone of the gracious indifference with which she had hitherto spoken to Jack.

Mr. Stuart drank his water very slowly and looked after her with a well-satisfied smile. "Good Lione, good old dog," he said, and called the greyhound to him and patted him on the head, "good old Lione."

“*Qui m’aime aime mon chien,*” observed Fanny, watching them from a distance. Major Thayer had studied French for four years at the military academy. So he only opened his eyes and said nothing.

And in this way they saw the Jordan.

For, although it was nearly an hour longer before they ceased to ride along its bank, the thicket had now grown even denser than before ; and this was the last sight of the river for many a day. It was with very different feelings that two of that party were to look at the Jordan again.

But now the path wound through a vast jungle of tall, feathery reeds “shaken by the wind,” which shot up high above the horses’ heads ; and as they rode along, a wandering gleam of sunshine turned all the yellow plumes into a burning line of gold. And still, as they rode on, the

mimosa-trees grew ever farther and farther apart; the stunted, twisted, tamarisk-bushes, still leafless and spotted with the black remains of last year's fruit, disappeared; and again they found themselves traversing a wide reach of plain, green here and there with scanty patches of coarse grass, but for the most part bare of even stones.

It was pleasant to Constance to be once more in the midst of this voiceless calm—a silence as profound, and yet differing in quality from the silence of the desert. She dropped her reins upon her horse's neck, she turned herself carelessly about in her saddle—a gallop was out of the question here, where one dared not lose sight of the escort—and her eyes wandered well pleased from the soft luminous sky overhead, across the undulations of the plain—fawn-coloured, or gray, or palest



brown, as the cloud-shadows floated slowly by—to the low and vast horizon. And now all the weary look had vanished from her face, and in its stead there had come an expression of deep and quiet satisfaction. For she was singularly sensitive to certain chance combinations of line and colour, this girl. Great spaces affected her almost in the same manner as music. In some moods, she would find a sensation almost too keen for pleasure in some perfectly unnoticeable effect of light; although as a general thing she avoided views, and had a perverse dislike to celebrated landscapes and other classified beauties of nature. Just now all the delicate, shifting effects of a sirocco morning were transfiguring these monotonous plains; and the girl noted with ever-renewed pleasure how every bit of colour, each touch of crimson or gold or blue in scarf or *cufieh*, seemed

to accentuate and vivify the day. Long afterwards Constance remembered this as the distinguishing quality of a day made memorable by an indefinite yet all-pervading sense of impending change. But the most important, because the most immediate result of all this was to make her forget about Jack.

For a moment—it was only for a moment—something in Stuart's words, or face, or action had alarmed her with a sense of oppressive scrutiny. His sudden assertion of independent individuality—this new revelation of his power to insist upon and enforce a request—had perplexed and startled her pride to a degree singularly out of proportion with the triviality of its cause. But it was difficult to measure the full significance of such a silent concession. It was like stooping to pat some favourite dog, and seeing him look up at

you with human eyes. It cast a curious, an alarmingly suggestive light upon much which had gone before. But now, as Mr. Stuart fell naturally once more into his usual place beside the palanquin—talking for any length of time to Fanny was calculated to inspire one with a protecting and condescending sense of masculine superiority which was not without its charm—as he rode on beside the palanquin, Constance looked at him earnestly again and again, her face clearing after each furtive examination. Not that she was disposed to undervalue Stuart. On the contrary. He was very kind; handsome; very good-natured. He rode fairly well. And still—— Tolerance is not a spontaneous virtue, but rather the final result of disappointment acting upon a noble mind. She filled up the blank with an emphatic smile. The reasons which

most potently affect a woman's conduct are, perhaps, the only ones she never puts into words.

But now they came upon a country of low, rolling downs; and now the hills grew higher, with steep sides cut away until there was barely room for the cavalcade to pass in single file along their summits; and presently the sheikh, riding on in advance, halted, held up his hand, wheeled about his horse, then dashed furiously down the stony side of a ravine.

Before them lay a pale and restless sea. The heavy surf broke in dirty yellow foam upon a beach bounded and black with long curving lines of drifted wood—bleached boughs of forest-trees, scattered and heaped like lines of dead men's bones upon this desolate shore. All the foreground was in shadow; but out at sea a ghastly sulphurous light broke through the shifting clouds,

turning the water to a dull, deep green. The day had grown oppressively hot, and the white blinding haze on the far-off mountains, the lifeless, enervating wind, the dim sunshine, the slow, sultry splash of the waves seemed each to add to this oppression.

"I think—— I am sorry to keep you waiting, Fanny; but if Jack is going to have a swim I might as well be making a sketch?" said Major Thayer, breaking the silence with a start.

Have I given you any definite idea of Major Thayer? Imagine a tall, loose-jointed, large-boned man of about fifty; a thin man, with an abundance of straight, black hair, streaked here and there with gray, and a sort of hard good-nature written all over the shrewd-eyed, resolute face—the type of face you see everywhere in America, on the seat of an express-waggon

or on the benches of the Senate. But Major Thayer's life had reached to neither extreme. Some thirty years before the time I write of, young Tom Thayer was one of a class of West Point graduates, whom a paternal government had plied for years with small but constantly repeated doses of French Grammar, Fortifications, and the Higher Mathematics, before sending them out to consider upon these points in the undisturbed seclusion of a frontier post. But as not even four years of daily drill can wholly eradicate all individuality, to these resources against *ennui*, young Thayer added the then rather uncommon accomplishment of a pronounced feeling for art, as symbolised by small water-colour sketches of undecided merit. And it was this feeling, doubtless, which saved him from habits whose merit was still more questionable. For thirty years

ago the manners and customs of the army officer were not yet above criticism. Whisky and cards, until one's pay gave out, and then whisky again, varied by such conversation as might be naturally expected from a party of isolated men, to whom pleasure was limited by their respective powers of drinking, to whom literature was represented by some odd numbers of a sporting novel, and to whom civilisation meant the extermination, in a given space of time, of a given number of Indians—such was their commonest formula.

Second-Lieutenant Thayer had entered the United States army with a certain amount of enthusiasm, a determination to distinguish himself speedily, and a confident belief in the rapidity of well-deserved promotion. Of course we all know that private interest has nothing to do with advancement in a well-organised republic ; and it is

presumable that even in 184— the country had already approximated to its present standard of official integrity. But young Thayer had no influential friends. And sixteen years after entering the service the enthusiasm had somewhat subsided, and Lieutenant Thayer was Lieutenant Thayer of Fort —— still.

Perhaps this may have had something to do with it ; perhaps he was only carrying out a long-matured wish of emancipation. In either case, one fine morning he went through his last drill, made out his last report of missing buttons and unregimental ties, shook hands with all his former comrades at the gate, climbed into the army waggon which already held his modest stock of worldly goods, and started for the East.

Perhaps it was the fertility of resource of the native American rather than the eternal



fitness of things which was illustrated by his next move ; for, three months after this exodus, Mr. Thayer was occupying the chair of Professor (of Belles Lettres, Painting, and Perspective) in a large Presbyterian College for Young Ladies, where tea-drinking took the place of whisky, and gossip, dress, and religion offered a pleasing change of topic from the familiar stories of his late companions. He stayed there nearly six months.

It was a piquant enough contrast at the first ; but even a contrast need not necessarily be an improvement. I am afraid Mr. Thayer was bored. You see it is quite within the range of possibility that a middle-aged man, with inexpressive eyes, and a necktie of the wrong colour, may yet be capable of cherishing an ideal which even the most fashionably-dressed young lady of his acquaintance may fail

to satisfy. Perhaps the young ladies, on their side, showed but little inclination to discover the secret sentiments of this awkward and silent man, whose embarrassed blushes presented a somewhat startling contrast to their own becoming equanimity. In either case the result was the same; within six months of his arrival at Princetown, Mr. Thayer again sent in his resignation and departed.

He departed somewhat suddenly at the last. Rumour averred that this unexpected haste was somehow connected with an interview of an interesting and strictly private character which the late professor obtained from one of his youngest and prettiest pupils. But Rumour is a proverbially fallacious goddess, even in the serene seclusion of a female college; and we need hardly credit this report further than we like. Whatever matrimonial disappointment he

may have met with, Mr. Thayer's next reappearance was in California, where he remained for some years: a period in his existence which Fanny always vaguely but decidedly referred to as, "The time when my husband was in business"—that elastic phrase which, in a mercantile community, may surely outrival charity in its capacity for covering a multitude of sins. In this case it covered nothing worse than an insurance-office, some experience in the mines, an unlimited quantity of quartz, and a very small one of gold.

It was not until after the close of the Civil War—through which he had passed in a sober, efficient manner—that Mr., now Major, Thayer once more returned to the East, and it was with very different prospects. For this time the unexpected inheritance of a rather handsome fortune

stood him in good stead—a most becoming background to his many excellent traits. At least such was the opinion of Mrs. Van Ness, whom he chanced to meet the very day of his arrival at Nahant, walking upon the sands with a young friend—of Mrs. Van Ness, who needed but one moment to see, remember, go through some rapid mental calculations, and then advance towards him with a perfectly unaffected smile; a cordial greeting; an invitation to dinner.

“For we shall not let you escape us now. It is our turn to do something for you,” she said; and here Miss Fanny looked up and smiled. “*Do* let us return a little of what we owe to you—to *all* the brave defenders of our country,” said Mrs. Van.

And there must have been something in the phrase which struck the good lady’s

fancy ; for it was with a nearly identical choice of words that, three months later, she presented Major Thayer with her blessing, a set of frail old china, and the hand of her dear young friend.

Unfortunately this opportunity of making a study of Major Thayer's impressions of married life is rendered impossible by a total lack of material. For of the two people most closely concerned in the experiment, one of them was silent with the habit of half a lifetime ; and I am under the impression that Mrs. Fanny knew very little about her husband. Certainly she liked him very well ; at the first, was even inclined to fascinate him into subjection, with all the small and pretty persistencies of a kitten investigating the unknown substance of its ball ; but what with one's toilet, one's servants, and one's pastor, the affections must

necessarily be limited in their calls upon one's time. After the second year of their marriage, Mrs. Thayer rather neglected these little conjugal coqueties, sagely reflecting, perhaps, that a devotion to society at large certainly included one's own husband to a quite sufficient extent. There were a score of men scattered about the world to whose lips old Tom's name was sure to bring a ready smile, a cordial word of liking and rough devotion; but to this amiable and demonstrative little woman he called his wife, he soon assumed the place of a secondary providence, whom one might always count upon in an emergency, and—being careful of course to propitiate it from time to time—safely and affably ignore among the minor pleasures of life.

And yet, on the whole, above all, seen in the proper focus of her own comprehension of things, it must be conceded

that Fanny behaved pretty well. Just now, for instance, she could scarcely be expected to derive much pleasure from this enforced halt by the Dead Sea; but you would hardly have guessed as much from the facile smile with which she glanced around and beckoned to Constance to draw near.

“You have been so quiet all the morning,” she said coaxingly, looking up into her friend’s face. “Are you very tired? Very hot? Jack says you have a headache; is it so?”

“Oh—I am quite well,” Constance answered, with a quick gesture of dissent.

“Because Jack was afraid you might be over-tired.”

Miss Varley smiled; opened her lips as if about to speak; thought better of it, and remained silent—gazing absently out at sea.

"You are not going to dismount?"

"It was hardly worth the trouble," the girl answered, hesitating, and then slipped her foot from the stirrup and swung herself lightly down. One of the muleteers was passing; she threw him the reins and went and sat down on the sand, in the shadow of Fanny's palanquin. It seemed even hotter now that they were no longer in movement, and there was nothing to break the silence but the sleepy lapping of the waves.

"The world is small after all," said Mrs. Thayer, in a meditative voice, and after a long pause.

"Why so?"

"Oh, I was thinking. I was speaking to Jack about Morris Stuyvesant this morning. . It is curious he should have known——

"Speaking about Mr. Stuyvesant? Oh



Fanny, how could you do such a thing?" said Constance hastily, biting her underlip and turning very red.

"Well, and why should I not? One must speak of somebody or other. And what harm is there in Mr. Stuyvesant's name, you silly child," cried Fanny, in high good-humour, nestling more luxuriously down amongst her cushions, and smiling affectionately at her friend with half-shut eyes.

And it was precisely this apparent innocence of any ulterior motive which made it so difficult to resent any of Fanny's actions. Somebody said once of Mrs. Thayer that she was a woman with the nature of a zoöphyte. She was gifted with a positive talent for small, incessant effort; and, like the work of that coral-insect to which she had been likened, there was a wonderful power of

cohesion, and hardness, and resistance in all the accumulated mass of these delicate, imperceptible touches. Just now it suited her plans for Constance's benefit—and in point of fact, she was as thoroughly well-intentioned a little woman as you will often find—it suited her plans, I say, to fill all her conversation with a thousand floating, intangible allusions and implications, whose immediate effect was first to embarrass, and then to force the girl into ever closer companionship with Jack.

Miss Varley did not feel particularly interested by young Stuart. This vigorous, energetic young fellow, with his keen enjoyment of life, his shrewd and limited intellect, and his habit of looking at things from their most obvious and common-place side—whose conception of his relation to his fellow-man never rose

higher, or went deeper, than an easy-tempered wish that everyone might be as comfortable as possible without disturbing any existing arrangements; and whose most independent mental action was the sincere and simple dislike he cherished for any man who did not get along and enjoy himself without making a row over it—belonged to quite another section of humanity from herself. There was no quality in common between them but their youth, and yet by some fatality circumstances seemed constantly conspiring to bring them closer together.

For example. They had found a lovely spot for their noonday halt—a wild and shadowy ravine, shut in by overhanging rocks—a deep and fragrant resting-place, all redolent with the faint and clinging perfume of the cyclamen. Luncheon was just over, and they were lying about on

the grass and fern, glad to escape for an hour from the vision of that colourless, pitiless sky, and all the heat and burden of the outer day.

"Does anybody know what has become of that game-bag?" cried the Major, suddenly looking up from his cigar. "Pass it over here, like a good fellow. I should like to have another look at that last bird you shot."

"Did Jack shoot those partridges? I thought it was the sheikh."

"Oh no," said Constance, innocently, "it was Jack."

Mrs. Thayer laughed.

"I—I beg your pardon, Mr. Stuart," the girl stammered, turning very pink.

"Why should you? I like it," said Jack, with malicious emphasis.

"Never mind, Constance. 'A rose by any other name,' &c.," suggested the Major,

good-naturedly, throwing a chicken-bone to the dog.

“I heard Dr. Adams read that once. It was to try the effect of the new sounding board. I never heard anybody reading Shakespere like——”

But had Miss Varley quite lost her head in consequence of this last blunder? “I wish Dr. Adams were—in Jericho,” she said, with sudden calm audacity. “He belongs to a class of clergymen who are nothing in the world but so many dragomen—spiritual dragomen, I mean. They have the same glib inexactness in their statements about the holiest things——”

“Constance!”

“The same fine indifference to irreconcilable facts,” and here she stopped and laughed, and looked demurely defiant at Fanny. “They are equally accustomed to taking people in and doing for them——”

But Mrs. Thayer had assumed an appearance of blank insensibility. She had a rare faculty — which she shared with many women, and a particular class of beetles—for effacing herself morally, for becoming at once flat and blind and tenacious at the first symptom of attack.

“It was not difficult,” she observed presently, with a suggestion of cold disapproval in air and voice, “it was not difficult to understand from whom these sentiments had taken their origin. A girl’s assertions are the merest reflex of what she believes to be the convictions of the man she most admires. And she had observed that ever since Mr.——”

“I beg your pardon for interrupting, but—Lione is eating up all the sardines,” said Jack, with happy irrelevance.

It was curious what a repugnance the young man was fast acquiring for even

the slightest mention of Mr. Stuyvesant's name.

Not long after that they began climbing the road to Mar Saba. From time to time a break in the interminable range of hills let through some glimpse of the Dead Sea, now black with storm, now glittering in the sun, or again, as they rose higher above it, of clearest steely blue. And then, leaving the last rounded hill-slope at their feet, and as the day was fast drawing to its close, they reached a winding road hewn out in the living rock. Above them towered a huge mass of mountain, so barren, so nakedly barren, that not even the poorest shrub clings to its rocky side; below was the precipice. It is a place where Nature seems flayed alive—dead and desolate and sterile as the lives whose long blind agonies of patience have consecrated these stones.

For here, clinging to the side of the ravine, its gray walls a very part of the gray rocks about them, they came upon the oldest convent in the world—a living tomb, buried in a wilderness, in the name of a religion whose very principle was life.



## CHAPTER VII.

STONE WALLS DO NOT A PRISON MAKE.

"WELL, Constance!"

"I say, Miss Varley, what do you think of this for weather?"

"Oh my dear child, how wet you are! Don't come near me, there's a darling. But you will surely take your death of cold."

"I think," said Miss Varley, gravely, throwing back the hood of her cloak, and making an ineffectual attempt at closing her umbrella, "I think the Deluge was a dry joke in comparison."

And the heavy downpour of the storm upon the canvas roof, the wild gust of wind which blew open the tent-door at that moment, only seemed to add emphasis to the remark.

It had been raining all through the night. It had been raining all the morning. It was already threatening rain the day before as they rode away from the almond orchards encompassing about the gray old walls of Bethlehem with a triple crown of pale and fragrant bloom. They were camping now at Bethel, their tents pitched on the grass-grown bottom of an ancient reservoir, which to-day's storm seemed fast restoring to its original purpose.

"Him one very bad look-out—very bad look-out for the ladies, sir," said Hassan, taking off his fez with an air of great despondency.

The men had been at work since dawn digging a trench about the encampment, and already a thin treacherous stream was creeping in beneath the sodden canvas, and settling in little yellow pools about each table and chair.

Towards noon there came a slight break in the clouds. Jack took up his hat and lit a cigar. "I can't stand this any longer," he said, and went out. When he returned, an hour later, the rain was pouring down harder than ever, and he himself was stained with mud from head to foot. There was a kind of village, a dozen Arab huts or so, higher up on the hill, he explained, and he had met one of the natives, an old man, who offered to show him a newly-discovered tomb. "He said no one had ever been inside it but himself, an Englishman, and two dogs. I thought I might as well add my name to

the list, particularly as the place is not yet down in 'Murray.'"

"And you saw nothing inside?"

"Nothing but mud."

"You should not try to bring away all you see, Mr. Stuart," said Constance, with a smile.

But it must be admitted that the situation was assuming a dreary aspect.

"I remember just such a storm one night on the Plains in '59," Major Thayer remarked as they sat down to dinner; and a singularly incoherent repast it proved to be, brought in by relays of dripping servants from the kitchen-tent across the way. "Shall I give you some of this chicken, Fanny; or will you wait for the soup?"

And, as he spoke, there came a sudden gust of wind that seized upon the tent, shaking it violently from side to side.

"There goes the table. Mind your fingers, Constance!" said Stuart, with a reckless laugh.

And the next moment there came a long, tearing crash, a shriek from Fanny, struggling in her arm-chair with the foldings of her plaid, a quick snapping of cords and flapping of wet canvas, and then the night and the storm seemed rushing in upon them. The wind had blown over the tent.

It was only a moment, of course, before the men had got it up again. But now, indeed, things were beginning to look serious.

"It is very bad, I am afraid very dam bad for my ladies, sir," said Hassan, with respectful regret. "Beds all wet; tent full of water——"

The men were hammering all around them at the pegs.

"Those pins can never hold in this soft earth if the wind rises again," said Stuart.

There was a moment's pause. Fanny had hidden her head among the cushions; Miss Varley was standing beside her, holding her hand, and looking anxiously at the different speakers in turn. The cold had grown intense.

"Perhaps—— It seems to me that I do not hear the rain," she said.

Major Thayer went to the doorway and looked out. He drew his head in again with a sudden exclamation. "I thought it was coming," he said, quietly; and held out his arm for them to see. The sleeve of his coat was all white with freshly-fallen snow.

It was dark by this time, and Paolo was making an ineffectual attempt at lighting the candles.

“Why don’t you bring in the lantern?” said Jack.

The insufficient light seemed to make their forlornness more complete, and Fanny moaned feebly at sight of the situation it revealed.

But half an hour later perhaps Mrs. Thayer was too dismayed to moan. She was clinging with both arms around the neck of a stalwart Syrian, muffled in sheepskins, and looking like a brigand, who with bent head and cautious footsteps was picking his way among the stones and bog towards the shelter of the village. The white drifts of snow only gave greater value to the darkness; the driving sleet dashed in her face whenever she lifted it to look about her; the wind was growing wilder with the falling night; and now, in surplus of horror, her guide was ascending a steep and slippery path, and begin-

ning to pant and stagger beneath his load.

But now, surely the worst of it was over. They had passed up a narrow stair, and in under a low stone archway; and now Fanny found herself gently sliding to the earth. Before her was a small, vaulted enclosure, bare and absolutely empty of any furniture but a roll of bedding hastily flung upon the ground. The room was full of smoke, and at its farther end she saw a fire, and Constance crouching down before it warming her hands. It was very dreary certainly, but they had had to turn out a whole family to get even that.

.. "And Hassan is delighted. He says it is one very much better place than he expected to find," said Miss Varley, looking up with a laugh.

It was a wretched evening at the best.



The narrow room was barely large enough to hold the four mattresses and leave a small clear space before the fire. It was impossible to stand; the smoke was too thick to allow them to sit up for more than a few moments at a time; and if the door was opened—window there was none—a quick white drift of snow came whirling in across the floor.

“I think I begin to discern some of the minor advantages of civilisation,” remarked the Major, grimly.

Once, towards morning, Constance awoke. The air had grown very chill. The room was still full of a thin blue haze, but the fire was blazing brightly, and Stuart was standing before the hearthstone piling on more wood. At the slight sound she made, raising herself up upon her elbow, he turned his head, saw her eyes open and watching him, and smiled.

"I think the wind is falling. It is not snowing now," he said in a whisper.

"It is so cold!"

"Come and warm yourself by the fire. Wait; I will make you a seat."

He dragged a rug from off his bed, rolled it up and threw it down upon the floor.

"There; sit there," he said.

She came slowly forward, smiling—a tall slim figure—gathering up the long, dark folds of her habit in both hands. Her face was all warm and rosy with sleep, like the face of a little child.

"You look about six years old," said Stuart.

"Hush! You will wake them up."

She sat down before the fire, blinking a little, and putting up her hand to shade her eyes from the light. They began talking together in whispers.

"Is it late?"

"Half-past three."

"I wish I could see if it had stopped snowing."

"Oh, you can look if you like. I have found a way to open the door."

"Hush!" said Constance, with her finger to her lip.

They listened a moment.

"No. Poor Fanny was awfully tired. I don't think you would wake her easily," said Jack.

They both rose, and began moving cautiously towards the door. Presently Miss Varley caught her foot in the long folds of her dress and stumbled against the mattress. Jack seized hold of her arm. "Be careful," he said; and then Mrs. Thayer sighed heavily, twice, and stirred in her sleep. They held their breath. Was she awaking? No; it was nothing. Mr. Stuart turned to his companion with a

comical smile of relief. He was still standing with his hand upon her arm, and so close to her that he could see her eyes shining in the firelight; he could feel her breath coming quicker with stifled laughter.

“Come on !”

They crept to the door, and Jack opened it noiselessly, an inch at a time.

“There is only a narrow ledge outside there. Mind you don’t slip off the step.”

The night was very still and cold. They were looking out across a wide plain; the air was full of a strange uncertain light, reflected from the snow. It was a starless night; the sky was broken and full of movement: one felt, rather than saw, the ceaseless, tumultuous unrest of the wind-vexed clouds. It had stopped snowing; only now and then a large flake floated slowly down and fell upon Miss Varley’s upturned face. They were standing under the shelter

of a small stone archway, built over the door. Beside them was a second stairway leading to the roof. Constance laid both her hands upon this parapet, leaning farther out. She shivered.

"You are cold. Give me your hand again; I am so afraid you will fall," the young man said in a whisper.

The fingers he took in his were burning hot. There was something strangely magnetic in their careless touch. He felt his own pulse quicken—a sense of confused pleasure which sent the blood pulsating faster through his veins.

"I wish she would say something—I hope she will not go away," he thought.

"You see—— I mean—— It is not snowing any more," he said aloud, with an effort.

"I beg your pardon. But the wind

blows all your words away. I did not hear——”

“I—— Oh, it was nothing.” And then, after a pause: “Miss Varley!”

“Well?”

“I wish you would tell me something.”

“Tell you what?” she said again, after waiting a moment.

What was he going to ask her? Perhaps he hardly knew it himself. But as he hesitated they heard the wind rising far down beneath them in the valley, the dark mass of clouds overhead was rent asunder with sudden force, and for one instant, through their trailing edges, appeared the pallid disk of the pale storm-troubled moon; and in another second the darkness closed about them, the bitter blast swept in long gusty sighs over the field of snow. As Constance turned her

face towards him the wind caught in her long and loosened hair, and blew it full across his lips.

They both laughed; they both turned with a common impulse to seek once more the shelter of the room. But Miss Varley was fast asleep—she had been calmly asleep for hours—before he could free himself from the memory of that clinging, silken touch.

The next morning broke cold and dark. A wild white storm was raging among the hills, and now the heavy, noiseless fall of snow was interrupted by fierce intervals of hail and sleet. Unfortunately, they had all awakened early. Indeed they had had but little inducement to prolong their sleep; still less, perhaps, to face the uncompromising length of all those smoke-filled hours. For in their hurried exodus of the night before it now appeared no

one had contemplated the possibility of a lengthened imprisonment.

Their resources against *ennui* were singularly few, and consisted chiefly in cigars, a small pocket Bible, and a fragmentary pack of cards—the two latter a contribution from the dragoman. Perhaps there was something in the very incongruity of the gift which served as its antidote; it may be that even euchre requires a mind unhampered by preoccupation; certainly Mr. Stuart was the first to throw up his hand, the first to declare that the game was not a success. And although there was a certain satisfaction in knowing this was Bethel, although they had been nearly drowned upon the very spot where Jacob slept and dreamed, still it was really snowing too hard for one to care for Jero-boam.

Historical associations were all very well



in their place. "You need not laugh, Tom ! I'm sure there is not one of you more interested in sacred geography than myself ; but, oh, it was dreadful how one missed one's four-o'clock tea," Mrs. Thayer remarked, with a yawn.

"And yet it might have been worse, you know," Constance suggested cheerfully, looking up from one of the desultory attempts at amateur cookery with which they tried to diversify the day. "When you are anxious not to have your chocolate burn, Mr. Stuart, you should keep your eyes on the fire, and not be watching me. It might have been worse, Fanny, after all," Miss Varley said.

"How ?"

"We might have been here with Aunt Van !"

Major Thayer laughed. There *are* limits to human endurance, he objected, dryly,

however little Constance might take the fact into account.

And "Oh, of course. It is well known that poor Mrs. Van Ness can never do anything to please Tom," his wife remarked, with a sigh.

"What! Not when she introduced me to you, my dear?" he asked, with perfect good-humour.

Miss Varley smiled. Her earliest recollection of her aunt was a peculiar one, she observed, turning to Stuart. It dated back years and years ago, to the time when Mr. Van Ness was still alive. Mr. Van Ness had been extremely handsome. "My father remembers him as quite a young man, and very proud of his complexion and hair; but when we children knew him he had been injured in a railway accident. They told us he had been all patched together, and we used to spend whole

hours watching him in the hope he might come undone," Constance added, with a laugh. "But the first time I saw them my father had taken me down to The Cottage with him—perhaps as a palliative; for he had gone there with bad news about the marriage of one of our cousins. I remember Aunt Van sitting on one side of him, holding his hand and sobbing: 'Oh my dear Henry, if she marries an unbeliever, think—think of her immortal soul!' and Uncle Van on the other side: 'Bother her soul, Henry; has the man means? What means has the man got? Bother his soul!'"

"And, oh Constance, have you forgotten Miss Wallace? Miss Wallace is one of Aunt Van's *protégées*, Jack——"

"She really is very good, you know."

"One of her *protégées* — a thin little woman, with a long thin neck, and faded

eyes and ringlets. In the afternoon she puts on a black silk apron, and sits in her little garden under a rose-tree, watching the hens and reading Miss Porter's 'Scottish Chiefs.' She is poor—oh, wretchedly poor!—but she traces her pedigree back to Sir William Wallace; and about twice a year she gets a letter from a cousin who sends her money. She calls that 'a communication from the family.'"

Miss Varley had remarked as a curious fact that when by any chance there has been a great man in any family, his descendants seem to pride themselves upon getting as far away from him as possible.

"Yes; but I must tell Jack about Aunt Van," said Fanny, laughing. "You see she had taken a great fancy to a particular dentist in New York—Aunt Van is always

taking particular fancies — and nothing would satisfy her but giving the man a trial. She could not go herself—perhaps she did not care to ; so what does she do but send poor Miss Wallace, with strict orders to have all her teeth drawn out and an entirely new set put in—at Aunt Van's expense. 'It will be such a comfort to you, my dear, when it is all over,' Aunt Van told her, patting her on the shoulder. 'But, dear Mrs. Van Ness, I have never had a toothache in my life !' 'The very reason you should take precautions. There, my dear, there ; we'll say nothing more about it,' says Aunt Van, patting her again. And the poor thing actually had it done. It made her very ill, I remember, and Mrs. Van used to go down and look at her, and tell her how thankful she ought to be to think it was all over. But she has always been espe-

cially fond of Miss Wallace to this day."

Mr. Stuart laughed. "I should like to see her?"

"Oh, it is not unlikely. We left her at Naples; but there was some talk of her joining us at Damascus before we left."

"Now, heaven forbid!" ejaculated the Major, with edifying fervour.

"What! afraid of her are you, Tom? And you, Miss Varley, are you one of the victims too?" said Jack.

There was certainly something peculiar about Mr. Stuart that day. He had hardly spoken to Constance twice since morning, and yet the girl was constantly aware of his attentive and persistent glance. "And you, Miss Varley, are you afraid of her too?" he asked.

"Oh, I like Aunt Van—in a fashion. I have known her all my life; and she is

really very kind-hearted if you only agree with her."

Major Thayer shook his head dubiously, making some confidential remark to his cigar.

"Well, I frankly admit it—if Constance is not afraid of her, I am," said Fanny, laughing. "But that is one of the advantages of being small: you are not expected to be uncomfortably brave."

But Mr. Stuart questioned the sentiment. The Major went still farther—he denied it.

"The pluckiest man I ever knew," he said deliberately, "was a quiet, delicate-looking little fellow, and not much to look at any way. It was quite at the end of the war. He was with the sanitary commission people at first, and then in the hospitals. Wouldn't fight because he was half a Southerner by birth, and had some

kind of scruple about it; but he knew the country, and if ever there was a bit of dangerous reconnoitering to be done it was Lawrence who volunteered."

"Lawrence? What Lawrence? You don't mean Denis Lawrence, surely?" said Mrs. Thayer.

Miss Varley started. She got up suddenly, and began collecting the cards scattered over the floor.

Yes; Major Thayer meant Denis Lawrence.

"Why, you knew him, Jack. You must have seen him. Wasn't he at The Farm three years ago, the winter you were there?"

Jack recollected him perfectly. He had never exchanged more than a dozen words with Mr. Lawrence. Fanny would remember he left the day of Mr. Stuart's arrival.



“Well, Constance remembers him at any rate.”

Miss Varley was building a card house. This is a delicate operation, requiring a steady hand and undivided care. Perhaps this was the reason her answer came with some reluctance. “Yes, I remember him,” she said.

“Once—it was in the times of Mosby’s raids, all the country was upside down, and the niggers coming into camp every day, each one with a different story—he started out to do a little scouting. Deuced bad weather it was, raining as it only rains in Virginia, and go where he would there wasn’t a gray-coat to be seen. He was coming back. He had stopped to get some supper in a cabin, when the old darky comes running in: ‘Look out, massa! Massa, Mosby comin’ up to the door!’ Lawrence runs to the window;

and, by Jove ! there was Mosby himself, and a dozen of his men, riding in at the gate.. The house was one of those one-room Southern shanties, built in a clearing, with a wood pile at the back. Since our fellows came so near trapping him at the Corner, Mosby was always precious careful not to get caught without a sentry again ; so he posts his men about the house, and comes in just as Lawrence swings himself out of the back window and on top of the wood.—But, Constance, I am sure I have told you this story before ? ”

“ Oh, please go on,” said Miss Varley, very quickly. Her card house had fallen to pieces at her feet. She was sitting with her hands clasped tightly together ; and Mr. Stuart noted with wonder, with admiration, perhaps even with a certain instinctive and unreasoning jealousy, the rapt excitement transfiguring her face.

“Well, the guerillas were in high spirits and made a night of it. Twice they sent men out to bring in more wood, and Lawrence felt them dragging the logs out from under his pile, and heard them swearing at the rain. Just before dawn they fired the cabin, ‘to teach that d——d nigger to give gentlemen a better supper another time,’ and rode away. But the point of the story is that someone asked Denis afterwards what he was thinking of while he was there in hiding. ‘Oh,’ says Lawrence—you know his quiet way of speaking—‘it was raining so hard, and I take cold so easily; I was wishing I had thought to bring an umbrella.’”

A pause.

“By-the-way, this Mr. Lawrence is a Catholic, isn’t he?” said Jack, suddenly, with an air of great unconcern.

“Oh yes; his mother was a Catholic,

you know. His mother was a Miss De Bray, from Virginia. The De Brays are all Roman Catholics, but I daresay Mr. Lawrence——”

Miss Varley found it impossible to imagine any reason which should prevent Mr. Lawrence from belonging to any form of religion he preferred; still, as a matter of fact——“I remember his telling me once that, to him, the mind of a modern convert to the Catholic Church was like the walled-up window of a house. The outline of the window was preserved, but serving as a repository for rubbish instead of a passage for light.”

“Would you mind saying that over again? I am afraid I did not quite understand the idea,” said Jack.

Fanny looked at him with unaffected wonder. There must surely be something abnormal in any set of circumstances so

evidently disturbing to Mr. Stuart's equanimity.

It may be that the young man is aware of it himself.

"Confound that snow! I—I think I shall go out for a little while, and see what Hassan has been doing with those horses," he says presently, and he goes out with a stride, and the door closes behind him.

Fanny has had time to fall asleep before he returns, but Constance—Miss Varley—is sitting in precisely the same attitude, and still playing with her cards. It has grown into a wonderful erection by this time, that pasteboard castle at her feet. And Mr. Stuart stands beside it, and looks at the young architect with a sufficiently peculiar expression.

"I—— Fanny is asleep, you know, and it would be a pity to wake her up;

but I thought—— It has stopped snowing,” says this considerate young man, “the clouds are all blowing away. Put on your cloak and come up on the terrace and see the sunset?” he suggests.

What a charming idea! Miss Varley is on her feet in a moment. A sunset, the fresh air—what could be pleasanter? “Where is your hat, Tom? Do find your hat. Has Mr. Stuart seen the Major’s hat?”

“It—— There is a good bit of snow on the ground,” Mr. Stuart remarks, “and if the Major has any fear of taking cold——”

“But how am *I* to go out then?” cries somebody else in great perplexity. “I have only these boots——”

It is a very pretty little foot Miss Varley holds out for inspection, and Mr.

Stuart, doubtless, is not unaware of the fact.

"I—don't—think you will get your boots wet," the young man says, looking very foolish; "the fact is, I thought you might like to go up there. And there wasn't much snow on the steps. And so——"

"And so somebody has been spending his time clearing it off?" cries out the Major, with a laugh. "Certainly you cannot do less than accept such primitive marks of goodwill from—from the natives. Go, my dear Constance, go; it will do you good. But if you will excuse me I think I shall remain indoors, and—and take care of my rheumatism, as Jack suggested."

And so presently these young people take their departure. And presently Mrs. Thayer wakes up—takes her head from

out the cushions, that is to say—and looks about her with a very sprightly air.

“Yes, they have gone. They went while you were sleeping, my dear,” says the Major, eyeing his wife rather curiously.

“Oh, they have gone, have they?” remarks that lady, with great satisfaction. “Well, let us hope dear Constance won’t catch cold.”

“Let us hope dear Constance won’t—won’t catch the rheumatism, while we are about it,” says Tom, with another queer smile.

“Catch the rheumatism? Catch the fiddlestick!” cries Fanny, with great decision. “Jack is a dear good fellow. I was always fond of Jack.”

“Oh, so am I—uncommonly. And, as you were saying, Jack has a very good business head; and when his father dies he will come into a very pretty income,



no doubt. And—and dear Aunt Van will be so pleased at your marrying off Constance after her own failure in that line.”

It is decidedly dark in this smoky little chamber, but I think there is no doubt that Fanny blushes at this juncture.

“Have I ever said a word about marrying off Constance?” she demands with some trepidation.

“Never, my dear, never. Let me do you the justice to say you have never mentioned it. And I don’t think you ever spoke to me much about that pretty Miss Schuyler Jack was so infatuated with last year. Last year? Stop! I think it was only this spring. But you should know, Fanny; you keep a better account of the boy’s flirtations than I.”

“I—I’m sure I don’t know what you mean,” says Fanny, still more meekly. It

was so seldom Major Thayer took the trouble to put his observations into words, his wife was apt to treat them with the kind of respect one accords to a powder-magazine. There was no means of estimating what an explosion of all her little devices might be impending. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean," says Fanny. "I don't see what there was to laugh at in Jack's way of coming for her. I thought it was very pretty myself."

"I thought you were asleep, my love?" says the Major, taking out his cigar-case.

"At all events Jack is your own cousin—your own cousin, remember, and not a relative of mine," says Mrs. Thayer, with great dignity; and I think you might—I mean, I think——" She hesitated, she looked up, she laughed, and laid her pretty head against her hus-

band's arm. "Don't interfere there's a dear good old Tom," she said coaxingly.

"*I* interfere? You are quite right in mapping out your friends' careers for them, my dear child; you certainly are a very remarkable judge of character. *I* interfere with Master Jack's amusements? Not if I know it!" said the Major, grimly. "Jack is my cousin, you say? Very well. I don't know that there is anything in that fact to prevent his being a young idiot as well. For Constance won't marry him. Constance, let me tell you, has no desire to go and live in the streets of Gath. You cannot bribe her with a country house in Ascalon——"

"Ascalon! Gath!" Mrs. Fanny protested she had not an idea what the Major could mean.

"I mean—by George!—I mean that our cousin is a young Philistine, my dear.

An honest, good-looking, stupid young Philistine, with no more chance of ever evolving an idea from that handsome head of his than I have of being made Prime Minister. I mean that Constance has more in her little finger than that good-natured young donkey in all his brain. I mean that Jack had better stick to leading cotillions, and flirting with the Schuyler girls, and putting his father's money into circulation for the next five years at least; and Constance——”

“Constance is quite old enough to know her own mind—quite,” said Miss Varley's friend, with some impatience. “But, Tom” (she put her other hand upon her husband's shoulder), “don't interfere, dear Tom. Let things take their own course, that's all I ask of you,” she said.

Major Thayer was in the habit of accepting his wife's caresses with much

philosophy. "All right. Only let me light my cigar in peace," he answered good-humouredly. "If Jack doesn't make a young fool of himself to please you, you may be sure that Tom or Dick or Harry will. A man can only be young once. Let the boy enjoy himself while he can. He'll come upon his troubles fast enough—and come out of them too. Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love," remarked this ex-Professor.

"I don't see how that applies to Jack," said Fanny, with mild persistence.

But, for my part, I fancy the Major was not referring to Jack.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ON THE HOUSE-TOP.

At first she would speak of nothing but the view. "It was a joy, oh such a joy, to breathe this air!" she said. She threw back the hood of her cloak; she leaned her arms upon the parapet; she looked down into the valley. The desolation of the winter was about them. Here and there a thin blue fillet of smoke rose steadily up through the windless afternoon, and here and there the brown walls of a house stood clear of the drifted snow.

The thaw had begun ; the air was full of its faint whisperings—the gurgling sound and the stir of running water.

“ I can’t understand why you should look so happy to-night ? ” said Stuart, presently, leaning forward and looking up into her face ; “ what are you smiling to yourself about ? You look,” said the young man, suspiciously, “ you look like a person who has heard good news.”

Constance laughed. “ Well—you have just told me we should get away to-morrow,” she answered evasively ; but she had the grace to blush as she spoke.

“ I—I dreamed about you last night,” said Jack, looking away again and digging his stick into the snow.

“ Did you ? ”

“ It was a nice—an extremely nice dream.”

“ Indeed,” said Miss Varley, very gravely,

opening her blue eyes to their widest extent; "indeed!"

"And—I say, Miss Varley—Constance—I wonder if you would mind if I should call you Constance?"

"Mind it? No!"

"What! really not?"

"Really not. Why should I? If it gives you any pleasure, call me so by all means. And then, you know, when one remembers the example I set you the other day——"

"But you've never called me by my name since—not once," says Mr. Stuart, eagerly.

"Haven't I? How very neglectful I am, to be sure!" says Miss Constance, beginning to laugh again.

She is always laughing at him, Mr. Stuart thinks, savagely; and perhaps the young man's face expresses some of the discomfort he feels, for presently:



“Have I really vexed you? I am so sorry. Indeed I did not mean to. But after all that smoke I think this fresh air must be going to my head!” somebody says, with the utmost friendliness. “Come, Mr. Stuart—come Jack”—and here a dogskin gauntlet is held out to him—“forgive me, and shake hands, and make friends—won’t you?” says the owner of the glove.

Forgive her! make friends! Mr. Stuart is ready to—to—— In fact, you know he is ready——

Perhaps it is quite as well for the duration of the present peace that he is too much occupied in digging holes in the snow with his stick to look up as he makes the foregoing statements, and see the frank surprise, the mischievous amusement that fill the blue eyes by his side.

But it is not to be supposed that such

an event as the imprisonment of a whole company of backshish-giving *howadji* could pass unnoticed in an Arab village. We may be sure that many a pair of dark intent eyes have been observing the proceedings of these two young people from the neighbouring roofs.

“Look! there is a man at his prayers,” says Constance, pointing with her hand, and then falls silent, watching the tall figure rising and bowing—a dusky shape against the winter twilight. There is always a certain suggestion of melancholy in a figure seen thus—a black silhouette against a fading sky—no longer an individual man, but a mere fraction of humanity half-hidden in the gathering shadows. It is nature’s revenge upon man’s daytime supremacy—a transfiguration in which all the commonplace of appearance and existence disappear, are lost in the great mystery of coming night.

The last wan line of crimson dies away behind the hills; here and there a star is shining in the pale cold blue of the sky.

"I should like to know what you are thinking of?" says Jack, breaking a longer silence than has ever fallen between them before.

Thinking of? Miss Varley looks up at him with somewhat wistful eyes.

"I was thinking of an old ballad I knew once," she says slowly, beginning to count the amber beads about her wrist as she speaks; it is a familiar action of hers, and one that betokens some inward perturbation. "An old German ballad. I knew someone who—— I mean, I have heard it sung. Perhaps you know it: '*Schön-Rohtrant*.' It is Schumann's music. I cannot tell you who wrote the words."

"Oh, I should probably be not much

the wiser if you did," says Jack, simply. "You know I never did care much for books."

And indeed this was quite true. Mr. Stuart's relation to literature being not unlike that of a Newfoundland dog to the water.

He could acquit himself quite creditably while in this unfamiliar element; might even secure some small waif or stray not too heavy to float, to which his attention had been especially directed; and, once on dry land again (so to speak), you may be sure he lost no time in shaking off the last vestiges of his late exploit.

"I did not know you cared for German songs," he says.

"I care for this one."

"Why?"

"I see Hassan bringing up the dinner. I can see Abdallah's smile from this dis-

tance," remarks Miss Varley, calmly, in answer to this last demand.

And this, I protest, is a full, a faithful account of the momentous interview upon which Fanny had based so many hopes.

But would Fanny believe it? She greets her friend with her most innocent smile. They have kept dinner waiting? Not a bit of it! Fanny likes to have dinner wait. She is sure the air has done Constance good. Jack was so very right not to let the Major expose himself. Dear Tom cannot be too careful.

"Dear Tom can very easily be too hungry, though," says the Major with a grin.

"I am very sorry. I knew we should be late. But I could not get Jack to come down," says Miss Varley, simply.

"Dear Constance!" Mrs. Thayer goes

up and embraces her friend with artless effusion ; “ my dear Constance ! ”

“ Pray don’t let me hurry you. What is dinner in comparison to the affections ? ” says the Major, again eyeing this group.

“ Dinner, Fanny ! and Tom shall tell us some of his army stories at desert. Tom has developed wonderfully of late,” cries Constance, gaily ; “ I’m sure I never knew him to be so interesting before.”

And this time Mrs. Thayer does not offer any embrace.

When they leave Bethel, a feeble sun is struggling through the morning mist. At first the road they follow leads them across a field of stones, a plain of scattered ruins buried in the half-melted snow ; and then, for a mile or two, their path is the broken bed of a mountain torrent, where the sure-footed Syrian horses scramble and poise like goats upon the massive boulders,

or splash, knee deep, through sudden icy pools. And now they have reached a lower level, where rain, not snow, has fallen through the storm. There is a stirring of colour among the hedgerows, a gleam of scarlet anemones, a flash of yellow butter-cups, some hint of hidden sweetness from a starry clematis-vine. As they go down, lower and lower, dry spots and sheltered nooks appear. At midday they stop for luncheon at the Robber's Fountain—a high gray cliff towering above three brimming basins of hollowed stone, and all overgrown with delicate drooping fern and frail white tufts of cyclamen.

And now the road grows wider, and winds past endless orchards of shadowy olive-trees ; gray-green as a mass, shivering into sharpest silvery light as the wind stirs in their branches. Then a long reach of pale young wheat “springing out of the

earth, clear shining after the rain," so tender, its colour is steel-blue in the sunshine, deepening to rings of greenest emerald where, here and there, an olive stands amongst the grain and casts its shadow on the ground. At every step the terraced hills sink lower, the valley opens farther out before them. A hundred new-born flowers look joyously up from out the grass; birds are calling to each other from the shelter of the small young leaves; a weak wind is chasing the light cloud-shadows faster across the plain; it seems the very resurrection of the spring!

"Do you see that village over there? That is Shiloh," says Constance, pointing with her whip. "Jack, if you will ride up to Fanny and tell her that is Shiloh, I will bet you a pair of gloves she mentions Dr. Adams's famous sermon about



the Infant Samuel three times within the next fifteen minutes !”

“Why do you so dislike poor Dr. Adams ?” says Mr. Stuart, reproachfully.

“I don’t dislike him ; he bores me ; he is a big man who is always making feeble puns and jokes—mild, clerical jokes, don’t you know, with a musty flabby feeling about them, as though he kept them in the same barrel with his sermons.”

“I wish—I really do wish you would not say such things,” says Jack, with sudden gravity.

“What things ? and why not ?”

“Oh, laughing at people, and so on. I never heard my mother or my sister laugh at a clergyman in my life,” he says in a very positive manner. And then there is a long silence. Miss Varley is looking at the hedgerows with an inquiring air ; Mr. Stuart is watching her face.

“You—you are not angry?” he asks presently, riding up closer to her as he speaks. “Constance, you are not angry? I would not offend you for the world!”

Miss Varley is not offended in the least; in fact, does not see why she should be—and says so, with exasperating calm.

“And you will give up the habit—for my sake?”

“Oh, if I had such a habit, and there was any harm in it—which, mind you, I don’t admit—and if I gave it up for anybody it would certainly be to please Fanny,” Miss Varley answers, carelessly enough.

“And you would not do it for me?” He rests his hand upon the neck of her horse, and half checks his own, and looks down into her face. They are riding in a narrow sunken lane, across which a branching fig-tree casts the dappled shadow

of its small young leaves. As they slacken their pace Lione comes bounding back and looks up at them and whines and rubs his golden-brown head against Miss Varley's horse.

"You won't do it for my sake, Constance?" says Jack. It makes a very pretty group, seen from the palanquin.

She lifted her face up suddenly and looked at him straight in the eyes. Once before he had seen this same expression of distress, of defiance in her glance. "I wish you would speak of something else," she says bravely, but with a palpable effort.

"I will do as you like," the young man answered simply.

They rode on for nearly a mile without another word.

The camp that night was in the plain of Labban. A hundred feet away from

the tent-door a little spring bubbled up amongst the fern-grown ruins of an ancient khan. Farther on, a long green reach of meadow-land was dotted with feeding herds—big, brown-skinned cattle—guarded by brown cloaked Bedawy.

It was a simple and patriarchal scene; and after dinner, as they sat in the doorway of the tent, drinking coffee, it was pleasant to see these strange and savage figures sitting motionless in the last level rays of the sun, or leaning upon their spears, watching their flocks by night.

“That village we passed this afternoon was Shiloh,” Fanny remarked, after a while. “Did you know it? I wish someone had told me of it sooner, for Dr. Adams——”

Jack laughed involuntarily, and looked over at Miss Varley. She was sitting on the grass, playing with Lione’s ears as he

rested his head on her lap. There was something very gentle, very subdued in her manner that evening. She hardly spoke. Once or twice as Jack looked up, he felt her eyes fixed upon him. There was a singular seriousness, something almost melancholy in their glance.

"Are you tired, child?" asks Fanny, presently, leaning back in her chair.

"Very."

"I'm sure I don't wonder at it! That constant riding is so fatiguing. Even I, with my palanquin, am quite used up. I don't want to disturb you, Jack, but if you would hand me that cushion—— Thanks. And there was another little one. Constance is leaning on it. Oh, I didn't see," says Mrs. Thayer, sweetly.

"Oh, take it, Fanny. Lione will do for a pillow quite as well," the girl answers, laughing; and, as she speaks, the dragoman

appears majestically smoking a chibouque, and asks for a few words with Miss Varley.

There is a moment's consultation, and then they see Constance walking hurriedly away in the direction of the kitchen-tent. Presently Luigi comes running back to fetch a box.

"What is it?" Fanny asks, with languid interest.

"My lady want her medicine, lady. One man very bad hurt," says Luigi, with the box under his arm.

It was so like Constance! She was always doing these ridiculous things. It was just the same way on the Nile; they used to come to her if anyone scratched his finger.

"As for me, I told Hassan from the very first I was not to be disturbed about the men's accidents. My nerves will not

bear it. It is a question of health with me," says Fanny.

"It is a question of health—other people's health—with Constance," Major Thayer remarks, placidly.

"Oh, Constance has always had a mania for sacrificing herself. It was exactly the same way at school. They used to call her Don Quixote; she had such ridiculous fancies about things, not a bit like the other girls. She was almost the youngest there; but I think they were all a little afraid of her, all except me. Constance can be very severe over anything she thinks dishonourable; and proud—proud as Lucifer—if you take her the wrong way. But I always knew how to manage her. There is nothing she would not do for me," said Fanny, complacently. She settled herself more comfortably back in her chair, and glanced round at Jack.

“Do call that dog away. I can’t endure to have him touch me,” she said.

“Were you—come here, Lione!—were you long at school with Constance?” says Mr. Stuart, bending down to examine the dog’s collar.

“Always. That is—I left before she did, of course; but we have been together since we were babies. You know Captain Varley was my guardian. I remember,” said Mrs. Thayer, pensively, “I remember the last term before I left school for good,” with a glance at the Major, “there was a girl we all hated: Walker her name was—Mary Walker. I think she was a cousin or something of the principal, and they had her there for charity. She was an ugly, shabby little creature, anyhow, and we none of us would speak to her. She was in training to be a governess—reading for a French prize—we could not under-



stand how it was she took so many honours, for she was a very stupid girl, until one day, quite by accident, Constance saw her copying her exercises out of some old book. It was Constance's own work, I believe ; something she had done for her amusement. That was one of the queerest things about Constance ; she absolutely studied to amuse herself——”

“Well ?” said Mr. Stuart. It may be he too was wondering in a simple way over this last announcement.

“Well ! the end of it was very characteristic, certainly. First, she made the Walker girl swear she would abandon her evil courses—as though that were likely ! but Constance is so credulous. And then she stayed over Christmas week in town—you remember that Christmas week at Aunt Van's, Tom ?—she stays over all through the Christmas holidays to coach

that wretched creature through her grammar. She got her diploma, I know, and after that they gave her a salary, and her aunt made more of her. But I don't think she ever thanked Constance."

"Don't you think it is time someone went to see what has become of Miss Varley?" said Jack, and went out without waiting for an answer.

It had grown dark meanwhile. There was a leaping fire in front of the kitchen-tent; a circle of muleteers stood around it, their shadows stirring curiously upon the canvas wall at every motion of the wind-blown flames. The young man sauntered up to the group, and looked in. Miss Varley was kneeling upon the ground; Hassan was standing near her holding a lighted torch. She had pushed the sleeve of her habit back over her white arm; there was a sponge and a

basin of water by her side. As Jack drew near, she was already binding up the injured foot with a firm dexterous touch.

"Ask him if that feels more comfortable, Hassan," she said. "If it does not feel more comfortable, I will do it all over again." She looked up at her patient with the sweetest, the most compassionate smile.

"*Taïb, Abdallah?*"

"*Taïb, ketir!*" said the man with a quick lighting up of the wrinkled anxious face.

A broad white smile flashed responsively around the dusky ring of lookers-on.

"That Bedawy—the one with the child—is to have some of that ointment to rub on his shoulder, Hassan," said Miss Varley, getting up to her feet and pulling down her sleeve. And then, for the first time, she was aware of Stuart.

“What was the matter?”

“Oh, it was only that unlucky old Abdallah. He is always getting hurt. This time a mule stepped on his foot. I hope Hassan will remember not to make him walk to-morrow. I must get up early and see about it before the train starts off,” she said thoughtfully. And then, after a moment’s pause: “Considering that I never tied up as much as a cut finger before we went to Egypt, and that I have unlimited control of Fanny’s medicine-chest, don’t you think I ought to be congratulated that so many of my patients escape with their lives, Mr. Stuart?” she added, laughing.

“I think that you are an angel of goodness—to everybody but me,” said Jack.

They had adopted very early hours here in Syria. Breakfast was on the table punctually at six o’clock, and as a

usual thing, the lights were all out in the tents long before ten. But that night Miss Varley chose to sit up later. Long after the camp had settled into darkness, a feeble glimmer shone beneath her door. She had taken a key from about her neck, had opened her box, and was sitting before the table, reading. It was a manuscript volume—a journal evidently—with here and there some loose papers, some verses, a photograph, a half-finished sketch, thrust in between its leaves. At first, Miss Varley had written a few words in it; now she sat turning over the pages, looking at the dates. The earliest of them was of three years before, the latest was of yesterday, and on every page some words were constantly repeated. Once, after a long pause, during which she had sat so motionless you might have believed her sleeping, Miss Varley repeated these

words aloud. The wind rustled at the door of her tent, and the girl started up, her heart beating, the colour coming and going in her cheeks; and yet there had been nothing to frighten her in what she said. After all, it was only a name—the name of Denis Lawrence.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SOME GOOD SAMARITANS.

ONE long unbroken sweep of wheat-fields stretched past and around them. The foot of the hills was thickly overgrown with olives, circling, a silvery gray cloud, about the stones. Higher up, the fig-trees twisted their quaint leafless branches in a network of pale purple against the sky, or rested, a violet smoke, in the crevices and fissures of the rock; and from mountain to mountain the valley flowed one wave of living green. The sky was of a pale and cloudless blue, still

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tremulous, still quivering with the spent passion of the storm; and spring, that 'child of many winds,' was in the air, and all the world was filled with a sweet faint perfume as of a hundred growing things; a low melodious calling of bird-voices; the languid whisper of the breeze, running in green-white waves across the rustling sea of wheat. They were riding across one of the fairest plains in Palestine—across that parcel of ground that Jacob bought; where Joseph wandered, looking for his brethren; across the valley where Joshua proclaimed the Law; and on and on across the sun-filled land, to the margin of that wayside well where Jesus rested, being wearied with his journey, and spake with the woman of Samaria.

I do not know how it happened that, as they rode along, the conversation fell upon the strange history of Simon Magus.



Perhaps it was that Major Thayer had been reading about him of late. It may be Miss Varley had her own reasons for preferring to speak of some impersonal matter. But surely there must be something fascinating to the meagerest imagination in the story of this Samaritan fanatic; this mystic propounder of Egyptian myth and Jewish doctrine; this dreamer of dreams—a prophet bewildered by weak echoes of the large utterance of the early gods; this false Christ; “the Osiris of a known age—a Jupiter within our era;” this Syrian peasant to whom a column was erected in far-off Rome—*Simoni Deo Sancto*; this forerunner of Comte, worshipping the divine idea in the guise of a woman; this visionary, wise with strange wisdom of the East; this impostor, performing daily miracles, “to whom they all gave heed, in the city, from the least to the greatest.”

There was, I say, something singularly interesting in this history listened to here under the very shadow of the Mount of Blessing; and so it came to pass that all through the long sunny morning Constance and the Major rode apart.

But it was still early in the afternoon as they passed the first houses of that ancient city, Shechem—the modern Nablous—the city of running streams, and blossom-burdened gardens, and sombre tunnelled streets.

As they drew up before the door of the tents they heard a discharge of firearms; a company of Turkish horsemen were turning slowly away. It was the governor and his escort, Hassan informed them in an important whisper.

“Governor very strong man here, sir. I tell him you one big general, make him afraid. P’raps, I not tell him so! do some-

thing not please him, he take away one, two, three, my men."

"Nice kind of person that," said Mr. Stuart, lazily.

"Yes, sir ; very big man, sir. Very bad man. I do him honour. Wish I had more guns ; I fire another salute."

"Here, take my revolver," says Jack, good-naturedly. He drew his pistol out of his belt and passed it over to the dragoon.

"Oh Jack, how could you ! Think of the horrible noise !"

"What ! does it really go off ! Do you know I am rather surprised at that. I thought it was an ornament," says Constance, smiling.

The young man turned rather red. "We can't all be Mr. Lawrences," he said, drily ; and this time it was Miss Varley's turn to blush.

After lunch they sallied out to inspect the city. And here again Miss Varley walked off with Tom, leaving the other two to follow at their leisure.

They followed on for the most part in silence. Was anything the matter? Had he offended her? Was it possible that she did not understand—— The young fellow, stalking gloomily along, revolving these and kindred questions in his mind, must surely have been but a sorry companion. And yet—Mrs. Thayer did not seem displeased.

At first they went to Jacob's house, the house where the father mourned for his son many days and refused to be comforted. They pushed open the creaking gate and passed from out the noisy street into an old and silent garden—an up-springing wilderness of rose-bushes and oranges, with here and there a mossy peach-tree thrust-

ing a branch of pale pink blossoms across the narrow path. On one side stood the so-called house—an old church of the time of the Crusaders, but with a Saracenic arch apparently of much earlier date; now it is used as a manufactory of clay jars. They went in and looked about the deserted enclosure. The workmen had all gone home. The place was quite empty but for the rows upon rows of brown unbaked jars.

“It reminds me of a burlesque I saw once, ‘Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves.’ What a capital place for a ballet,” says Jack.

Miss Constance laughs: “Poor Jacob!”

They go out. At the farther end of the garden they come upon a dark, shadowy pool. A single ray of sunlight pierces the glossy green of the orange-trees that lean from the terrace overhead and catches on

a fringe of delicate grasses and rank pale flowers. Beside it two gnarled and aged cacti stand sentinel by the worn old gateway leading through another garden to the square ruined tower of a mosque. Its gray time-eaten stones are in full sunlight, high lifted above the trees; here and there a tuft of fern, a waving tuft of yellow wall-flowers, makes a spot of colour on its wind-and-rain blanched surface. There is a still, sunny silence brooding like a charm over all the abandoned spot.

It was like the entrance to some enchanted castle, Miss Varley remarked, absently. Had Fanny—had Mr. Stuart—observed those cacti? “The cactus is a plant that always looks to me both deaf and dumb. And those fig-trees up there, by the wall, with their dark purplish twigs, carved like fingers, and their leaves like open hands—is there not something uncanny

to you about a fig-tree ? I saw some to-day, as we rode along, with such intricate tracery of branches they might almost have suggested the Saracenic idea of ornamentation by lines."

"I don't know ; I never studied botany," said Mr. Stuart.

Once more they followed their guide down the long dark street, arched tunnel-wise above their heads ; picking their way over slippery jagged stones ; growing suddenly aware of the tumult of hidden streams, and turning a sharp corner to come suddenly out of the gloom and darkness to where a glorious rush of water leaped wildly over the edge of a ruined archway, and fell in dazzling mist in the brimming basin at their feet. Green masses of clinging fern, and starry blooms, and cool pale water-flowers, hung down in lovely profusion, glistening with mois-

ture, and trembling with the movement of the fall; and looking through the archway, and through the wonderfully clear water, they could catch glimpses of a sunny lawn and trees waving in the wind.

A little farther on they came upon the church of the Samaritans.

“We go in to see the synagogue, of course?” said the Major.

It was a bare upper chamber; a white-washed room, with curiously-shaped lamps swinging from the vaulted ceiling. At one end a white sheet was drawn before the Holy of Holies. The high-priest—a young man with a grave fervent face, the face of a dreamer and an enthusiast: beautiful, ardent, impassioned, like the face of the boy David—the high-priest drew back the curtain, and brought out and showed them the famous manuscript copy of the Pentateuch.



It was a curious scene : the little group of sceptical strangers, the roll of tattered vellum, the noble reverence of the priest bending over it, the three or four slim Syrian lads lounging in the sunny doorway, the small mean room, the high place and the altar of that strange forgotten people who feared the Lord and worshipped their own gods.

As they come out into the street once more the party is again divided. Mrs. Thayer wishes to return to the tents.

"Tom will take me there. You can go to the bazaar with Constance," she said.

Mr. Stuart was entirely at Miss Varley's service.

"I think I shall go back with Fanny," that young lady remarks.

"Nonsense !"

"But, indeed, Fanny——"

"Go on with Jack, and wait for me in the bazaar. I'll join you presently with Hassan. I'm going to make a sketch," the Major says decidedly. And with this understanding they part.

It was an embarrassing moment for them both—the more so, perhaps, that neither was quite sure what had occasioned this change. Of the two there was one who would have given much to have escaped the necessity of any interview. Naturally enough, this one was the first to speak.

"I am afraid we have been very selfish, Tom and I," she says, with a slight increase of colour on her cheeks; "Fanny seems so tired. But these people are interesting. I think this is a delightful place—don't you?"

"I think so—now," says Mr. Stuart.

Some men passing along the road turn

again to stare at the strangers, and Mr. Stuart returns their glances with a little of that abounding contempt we instinctively exhibit towards people who, in all probability, will never be in any fashion connected with ourselves.

“It is so seldom Tom can be got to talk. Tom is something like an Englishman in that respect. Did you never notice how an American will invariably endeavour to be interesting at any cost—either to others or to himself? Now an Englishman has the courage to be dull.”

“Some of us are dull enough without that,” says Jack, moodily.

The Arabs are still standing watching him. They whisper together. As the young man brushes by them there is a hoarse cry of “Backshish!” and then an insolent laugh. It is only a trifling annoyance, but it comes charged with

the weight of the morning's exasperation; and sends the hot blood flushing to his forehead. He turns upon Constance with that sudden irrational resentment of an unpleasant impression which is perhaps at the bottom of half the follies of life.

"Don't you think these small travelling-parties are a mistake?" he says, with an air of elaborate impartiality. "One sees the same people so continuously that—in fact, you see the same people so much."

Miss Varley is entirely of his opinion. She says so, and then bends down and busies herself with the folds of her habit to conceal a most unequivocal smile.

"Yes, I am tired of it," says Mr. Stuart.

"Indeed!"

"I am tired of the whole thing. You treat me like a boy. You laugh at me. You—you attempt to—to patronise me, by Jove!" cries the young man, turning very

red. "I don't like it. I don't think you are treating me fairly, Constance," he says, with sudden firmness, with an assertion of mastery in his voice that she has never heard before.

Miss Varley draws herself up and turns her face full upon him, and all the light and animation have gone out of that face.

"You are probably not aware of what you are saying. You will excuse me if I fail to understand——" she begins very coldly; and then there comes a sudden look of kindness in her eyes. "What is the use of quarrelling, Jack? You know you are talking nonsense. When have I ever done anything purposely to vex you?" she says very gently.

A group of fair-haired Nablous children are standing in a doorway. At the sight of the strange faces approaching them they

dart away like frightened birds, all but one, a little boy of two or three, who stands in the middle of the street and contemplates them meditatively. Such a flower-face as it is ! with the beautiful open look of a peach-blossom overblown. "Come here, you delightful little creature, and get some backshish," says Miss Varley, and holds up a tempting silver coin. There is a moment's hesitation and then the baby comes forward a few steps, stops, stares about him. "Poor little thing !" says Constance, and stoops to pick him up. To her surprise the child resists her with sudden shrill cries of alarm.

"Oh, put him down, do !" says Jack, hastily. There is quite a crowd around them by this time.

"Poor little thing ! You don't suppose it was afraid I had the evil eye ?" begins the girl, and at the same moment a woman,

veiled and shapeless in her cotton gown, breaks through the ring, seizes the sobbing child in her arms, and turns and addresses the crowd in high-pitched Arabic.

"Come on!" says Mr. Stuart again, and this time with even stronger emphasis. "Let that little wretch alone; it doesn't want your money. Here, let's get out of this."

But this is not so easily done. It is true the crowd parts before them, but only to close about on every side. "Backshish!" yells a tall one-eyed lad in a tattered gown, who has followed them persistently since they entered the bazaar. "Backshish!" calls out a man putting a hand on Miss Varley's shoulder and stooping to look into her face; "back——" A vigorous push sends him staggering against the wall.

"Take my arm; don't be frightened," says Jack, cheerfully. "If we can only get

through this infernal bazaar——” A shove from the yellow fanatic on the outside of the ring sends the nearest beggar upon him. He turns, and a shove from the other side flings Constance against his shoulder. No sound ; but the double movement meant mischief.

“Oh what shall we do?” says Miss Varley, turning pale.

To her dying day she will never forget what takes place within the next few minutes.

He took her hands in his ; he looked at her with a sort of despairing tenderness.

“Don’t be frightened,” he says ; “there is going to be a row. Here, stand back under that arch, and don’t move whatever happens. Don’t be frightened, and don’t cry. Don’t cry, my darling, I’ll take care of you.”

As luck will have it, the arch of which



he speaks is the gaudy-painted doorway of the mosque. A savage howl of execration runs through the crowd at sight of this new outrage. They press forward, stop, waver; and then Jack turns and faces them and draws his pistol from his belt.

“Come on, then! Why don’t you come on, you blackguards!” he calls out, in English; and, as by the breaking of a spell, the sound of his voice evokes a very storm of frenzy and abuse. With every moment the tumult increases. A piece of mud knocks off his hat; in an instant it is seized and torn to shreds; and the sight of his blonde Saxon face is the signal for a new outbreak of impotent rage. Twice already the jeering, hissing mass of infuriated men has pushed and swayed up to the very limit of the steps, and twice the sight of his steady unblenching face has

swept them back again with a sound as of the surf grinding upon the shore. And each time they have lessened the distance between them.

He took three steps forward, paused, then deliberately drew a deep line with the heel of his boot in the dust. "We'll see who crosses *that*, my men!" he says significantly. A long howl of defiance is the instant answer. And now, with one common impulse, the mob hurls itself forward and stands straining and foaming like a pack of craven white-toothed pariah dogs on the farther side of the barrier.

"Don't be frightened, my darling," says Jack; his own face is deathly pale, and great beads of moisture are standing on his forehead.

There is a scuffle, a push; one of the foremost assailants, a half-grown lad in a long blue caftan, is sent staggering across

the mark ; he falls heavily on his face and is dragged back by his nearest neighbours. And then comes an ominous pause.

From his vantage-ground on the mosque-steps Stuart overlooks the street ; and at this moment he is aware of a disturbance in the spirit of the mob—some new object is drawing their attention. There is a cry of “Allah !” the sound of a low, wailing, inarticulate chant, a sudden falling asunder of the close-packed men ; in the centre of this space, advancing slowly towards him, is a creature—a man. It has the figure of a man—but whether young or old it is impossible to say. A strip of sheepskin is slung about its waist, a long string of coarse amulets dangles from its neck and down upon the naked breast, covered with hair like the breast of an animal. On his head is a fantastic crown of iron spikes, from under which long and matted locks

stream down over his thick arms, his naked shining shoulders, his fixed and vacant eyes. He comes slowly forward, rolling from side to side in his walk, keeping time to the monotonous lolling chant. The crowd have fallen respectfully back, he stands alone in the centre of an open space, looking at Stuart with a dull malignant smile.

“My God! what shall I do?” thought Stuart, clenching his teeth. He moves, and the dervish catches sight of Constance. A sudden, furious gleam of insanity transfigures the livid face. He turns, with a wild gesture of exhortation—he turns and harangues the mob. He turns again—he walks deliberately forward. Jack raises the revolver slowly to a level.

And then a murderous silence falls upon the crowd. The dervish comes steadily forward; his foot is on the line; he looks up at Stuart with an idiotic laugh, and

then, like a mockery from heaven, th  
hear through the intense silence the inn  
cent bubbling laughter of a child.

The dervish passes the line. Constanc  
springs forward with a cry. The next  
sound is the click of the trigger settling  
back in its lock.

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